



思ふが 脚光者 を！

2

この素晴らしい
世界に
祝福を！
エクストラ

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Ano Orokamono ni mo Kyakkou wo!

Vol.2 - Beyond the Distant Harem

by Hirukuma

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思の者にモ脚光を!

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遠バーレー

の向こうに

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遠ハーレムの向こうに

つの素晴らしい
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口絵・本文イラスト/愛姫はぐれ

口絵・本文デザイン/百足星ユウコ+モンマ蚕(ムシカゴグラフィクス)

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Megumin:

Just who invited you!? Look me in the eyes and say it!

Yunyun:

That's, uh, the person is...

Lynn:

It's not like I'll get angry over that.

Dust:

Hey, you guys. Don't you have something to say to the great Dust-sama?

Eris:

Dust-san... Welcome to the afterlife.

Loli Succubus:

Ah! Are the two of you stealing a march on me? That's so unfair!

Keith:

Women are no good... Hanging out with us guys is the best.

Taylor:

I agree. Hanging out with men is best.

ご、ご一緒に緒してもいいですか?」

「あ、あのー。」
迷惑でなければ、

Umm, if it's not too much trouble,

c-can I join you?

character



LYNN

Occupation: Mage
Dust's party member.
Seems to be regarded
as his guardian when-
ever he causes problems.



DUST

Occupation: Warrior
A somewhat famous adven-
turer in the town of Axel.
There are some weird rumours
surrounding him, but no one
seems to know the truth.



YUNYUN

Occupation: Archmage
Even though her skills
as a mage are well
spoken of, she
generally works alone.



LOLI
SUCCUBUS

Occupation: Salesperson
Succubus who works at the
shop that provides good
dreams to male adventurers.
Has an unassertive
personality.



AQUA
Occupation: Archpriest



MEGUMIN
Occupation: Archmage



DARKNESS
Occupation: Crusader

Prologue:

In front of the hot springs stood a girl, blushing as she let out an anxious breath.

A single towel was far from sufficient to hide her bountiful assets that were far in advance of her years. Her important bits were almost visible.

“Um, if it’s not too much trouble, c-can I join you?”

Hearing a far sexier voice than I was used to, I unconsciously gulped.

This is the same girl who couldn’t speak properly with someone she doesn’t know, the same one who has the most common sense amongst the Crimson Demons... Yunyun, right?

There’s no way I can mistake her face and figure.

But I’m very well aware that she isn’t someone who would say something like that.

Normally, you’d expect her to be screaming something like “So you’ve even fallen this far! Police!”

I have no idea why she would come to my side in the mixed bath.

Eh, could it be that?

Can I draw that kind of conclusion from this?

It’s only proper to make a move in this situation, right!?

While concealing my inner turmoil, I answered as calmly as I could.

“A-Ah, sure, just do as you wish.”

Author’s foreword

(Originally, this is placed at the back of the volume, but given its contents, I felt it’s more fitting for it to be placed here.)

I didn’t expect to be able to write a second volume like this.

I'm sure the people who've bought this book have already read through volume one...right? I don't think there'd be a lot of people who'd start reading a series from the second volume, but just in case, I'll introduce myself again.

I'm Hirokuma, the one who's been placed in charge of this spinoff project following the previous volume. Pleased to meet your acquaintance.

To touch a little on the contents of this volume, it's mostly just Dust causing a ruckus as he goes about his life. Well, it's certainly how you'd expect a carefree guy like him to live.

This volume focuses a little more on his companions than the previous ones. Keith and Taylor have a bit more stage time here.

Though, talking about stage time, Yunyun is the one that has the most.

Lynn and Loli Succubus who were received very favourably in the last volume also have a lot of time to shine in this, so rest assured. Dust works hard to get along with the few women who are close to him in this volume.... Come to think of it, this volume also involves the city of hot springs and water, Alcanretia.

What would happen if you throw Dust into the headquarters of the Axis Cult? It's interesting to think about, isn't it? And if Chris and Vanir were to join in too... If you're interested, please look to the main story. I intended for this volume to have a greater focus on the comedy side of things. How did you find it? The hardest part about writing a spinoff for the Konosuba series is capturing its humour. I really wish to be able to catch up to Akatsuki Natsume-sensei's sense one day.

I've used up more than half of the available space, so I'd like to dedicate the rest to expressing my gratitude.

First off is Akatsuki Natsume-sensei. It's an honour to appear together with you in that joint interview and join you for the drinking party afterwards. Please keep up your good work! Dust really has a certain charm, doesn't he?

Next is Mishima Kurone-sensei and her character designs. I owe a lot to her designs in the creation of this volume too. It'd be quite difficult for me to manage if I didn't have those illustrations of Lynn to work with.

I owe a lot to Yuuki Hagure-sensei this time too. Loli Succubus and Lynn were

amazing. Lynn's smile and Loli Succubus's chest, and those expressions... Thank you very much for this.

Everyone in the editing department of Sneaker Bunko, and the one in charge of my project, Mr M. A big thank you to everyone involved in getting this book onto the shelves.

And lastly, all of my readers. It's only thanks to all of you purchasing the first volume that the second one could come into being. Thank you very much! I hope you'll help me out with this volume too!

Hirokuma

Chapter 1: A Meeting with that Goddess

Part 1

Accompanied with a large spray of water, a gigantic eight-headed dragon emerged from the lake.

That's the high bounty target, the Kowloon Hydra.

"Oh, wow, it really does deserve the high price set on its head!"

I excitedly yelled towards my companions as the Hydra reared its huge body, but they simply stared blankly at it.

I only came along because Kazuma was asking for help in the adventurer's guild, but this is far bigger than I thought.

Apparently, Kazuma tried and failed to take the Hydra down with just his party before, so now he decided to try again with help from the other adventurers.

We aren't the only ones to answer his call. Dozens of adventurers are participating in this fight.

The adventurers present had a grim look on their faces as they listened to Kazuma's instructions.

"All thieves, you brought your steel wires, right? Archers, standby with your grappling hook arrows!"

The archers and thieves nodded.

I could hear the voice of the priest screaming "Hurry up! Hurry up!" as Kazuma explained everyone's roles, but I'll ignore it for now.

The basic outline is to let Darkness act as bait and draw the Kowloon Hydra away, before blowing it away with the explosion girl's magic.

As expected of someone who deals with those three troublesome ladies every day, the instructions are precise and the overall plan isn't bad.

"Even though Kazuma's pretty weak in combat, he has a surprising amount of talent."

"Now's not the time to stand around being impressed! Keith, is the arrow ready!?"

"Yeah, leave it to me."

Keith is currently attaching the rope to the arrow.

"Sadly, Darkness alone won't be able to stop all the attacks of that Hydra. I'll be protecting the rear guard!"

"Don't do anything reckless, Taylor! If you take an attack head on, there wouldn't be anything left of you!"

"Yeah, I'll bear that in mind!"

Taylor and Keith ran over to where the rest of the rear guard was gathering.

Looking closely, I can see the nervous form of Yunyun amongst the mages.

Even in such a situation, she still couldn't get over her unease when facing unfamiliar people.

On the battlefield, the heads of the Hydra were tied together by the thieves' Bind, the grappling hook arrows were entangled in the steel wires that the thieves used, and those adventurers who were confident in their strength were pulling on those ropes in order to prevent the Hydra from escaping.

"Hey, what is Kazuma doing!?"

While Darkness was fending off the Hydra's attacks, Kazuma climbed up onto the Hydra's back and was doing... something up there.

Judging from the way the Hydra started violently thrashing around, that must have been some kind of attack.

Even so, that's way too dangerous. I always knew that Kazuma was bold, but I didn't think that he would go this far.

"Ah, watch out! Kyaaaa!"

Lynn let out a scream as she watched Kazuma get bucked off the Hydra's back.

It's great that Darkness managed to grab him before he hit the ground, but then the Hydra rolled over the both of them, covering them with its entire bulk.

If it was Darkness alone, between her prided toughness and the various support spells casted upon her, she could probably survive being crushed by the Hydra, but Kazuma would definitely die from that.

"Hey, you guys, don't let Kazuma and his party hog all the spotlight! Come on, you're all tough men, right? Put your backs into it!"

"I don't need you to tell me that!"

"We can get things done tooooo!"

"I'm a girl, but don't look down on me!"

Wishing to reduce the burden on Darkness by even just a little, one of the adventurers issued that challenge, and, with a loud scream, the surrounding adventurers redoubled their efforts in pulling the ropes.

Even though the Hydra seemed to be immobile, the other adventurers were too busy with trying to save Kazuma's and Darkness's life to launch an attack.

... Wait, isn't this the perfect opportunity?

Killing an immobile Hydra is something even I can do.

"Look, isn't the Hydra becoming really weak? And it can't move, either! I'll be taking the head of the large bounty target, Kowloon Hydra! The entire bounty can be collected by the one who finishes it off! I ain't sharing it with anyone else!!"

I loudly declared before letting go of the rope and charged straight at the Hydra's neck.

"H-Hey, what the hell are you saying right now?! Plus it only can't move because its necks are tied together. If you let your guard down..."

I think I can hear Lynn's voice coming from behind me, but I don't have time to bother with that right now.

If I take the Hydra's head right now, I'll get entire bounty to myself and be able to bask in the envious gazes of everyone else!

Just when I got within reach of the Hydra's necks, I noticed something.

Darkness, who was the focus of the Hydra's attacks until just now, is currently protecting Kazuma under the Hydra's enormous bulk. In other words, the Hydra doesn't currently have a target...

Just when I realized that, a huge mouth filled with numerous sharp fangs appeared in front of me.

Just before my vision turned black-

"Ahhh! Dust! Dust!!"

I think I heard Lynn scream.

Part 2

"Dust-san... Welcome to the afterlife. I'm the goddess that will guide you on your new path, Eris. Your life has come to an end."

When my vision became clear again, I found myself in a white, palace like place.

And a woman who suddenly told me such inexplicable things was standing in front of me.

She was wearing an exquisite looking white hagoromo, with pure white hair and light skin, unblemished by the sun.

<TL Note: Hagoromo: That sash thing that Aqua wears. Commonly depicted being worn by Tennin, beings roughly analogous to angels.>

Her clothes are similar to the needlessly expensive ones that high ranking priests usually adorn themselves with. It nicely accentuates her moderate chest, though... it feels strangely unnatural somehow.

It came to me in a flash. Ah, I see. Her breasts are stuffed. I only noticed it because I often pay attention to women's breasts and buttocks.

Well, as long as you look past her breasts, she's a top class beauty. That top class beauty regarded me with sad, blue eyes.

I'm used to the women giving me disgusted looks after sexually harassing them, but I don't recall anyone ever looking at me this way before.

"Did you fall for me?"

"Where did that come from?"

"Well, you were looking at me with the gaze of a maiden in love."

"This is the gaze pitying you who charged head first into the jaws of a Hydra."

This woman is really rude. It's only our first meeting, too.

Come to think of it, she said some inexplicable things to me earlier. Could she be a religious solicitor?

This pure white room certainly seems like the type favoured by clergymen.

"Sorry, I have no interests in such matters. Especially if it is the Axis Cult. Please go somewhere else."

"Eh? No, that's not what I'm trying to do. If anything, I'd be an Eris Cultist, and this isn't a religious solicitation."

"That's not it? My memories are a little fuzzy... Wait, don't tell me, did I end up drunk and cause a ruckus again!?"

"Um, excuse me, could you please listen to me explain?"

"In such a luxurious looking shop... You're planning on asking me to compensate a huge sum as payment, aren't you? Well, sorry to say, but my wallet is empty. Too bad, I definitely won't be done in so easily."

It's impossible for such a unblemished white empty room to be some kind of high class bar.

Did I step into some kind of secret noble's store?

"Ripped off... You really are a friend of Kazuma-san. Seems like normal methods won't get through to you."

"Oh, you know Kazuma, do you? This will be simple then. Just put it on my friend's tab."

"This isn't a drinking establishment! Please listen to me!"

Even though she looks calm and was speaking with a gentle voice, she suddenly shouted.

Huh? This voice and this feeling... Where have I...

"Let's start over again, Dust-san... Welcome to the afterlife. I'm the goddess that will guide to your new path, Eris. Your life has come to an end."

"Hey, come on, of all things, you had to proclaim yourself as the Goddess Eris. I thought you looked pretty decent, but you're the same as Kazuma's party-loving priest. Is proclaiming yourself a goddess the in thing to do nowadays?"

"Please don't lump me in the same category as Senpai!"

"Senpai?"

"Ah, sorry, that was unsightly. Anyways, you're dead."

Boldly saying something like that... it seems like Self-Proclaimed Goddess Number Two has appeared.

Though, unlike Aqua, the beautiful nee-chan in front of me is strangely convincing. She has the appearance and demeanour that doesn't make it sound like a joke even when she claims to be a goddess.

Could she be the real deal?

"Even if you say that, I have no recollection of it."

"Everyone's a little confused for a short while after they died. Please take your time and try and recall what happened."

Prompted by her gentle voice, I racked my memories.

"I woke up early for once and went to the adventurer's guild. Since I was both free and broke, I entertained myself by staring at Luna's peaks at the counter, and she threatened to call the police."

"... What are you doing bright and early in the morning?"

"I thought I'd try and find someone I know to sponge breakfast off of, then I ran into Kazuma..."

Unusually for him, Kazuma was working hard at recruiting people, so I decided to join in on the Kowloon Hydra extermination quest.

Apparently Darkness has some kind of grudge against that creature, but I don't really care about the reason. A friend of mine needs help. There's no reason for me to refuse.

Plus, my wallet was feeling a little empty.

Then, during the battle...

"Aargh, I got done in just as I was about to shine! Just a little more and I would've been able to hog the entire bounty!"

"You're upset over that part... But it seems like you finally understand. Unfortunately, your short life has come to an end. It seems like you were quite infamous in Axel, and lead a life that caused trouble for a lot of people."

Saying such things with a smile just makes you seem more scary.

There are so many things that came to mind that I didn't know which one to start with.

"Well, I don't really recall such things happening. At the very least, I didn't end up committing any crimes, right?"

"You very much did. How many times do you think the police have taken care of you?"

"Hey, come on, there's no way I could possibly remember that. Can you remember how many times you've been arrested by the police?"

When I replied to her question with another question, the Self-Proclaimed Goddess Number Two looked down and trembled.

See? You normally won't be able to remember such things.

"Zero times! Normally you wouldn't end up in the care of the police at all! It's because you lead such a life that you don't have any good karma... Huh? Wait, what?"

She ended up being flustered as she read the piece of paper in her hand. Just what is written on it?

She repeatedly looked towards my face and back towards the piece of paper.

"It seems like you've quite a bit of good karma. Eh? Even though you lived as you will back in Axel? Did I mix up the paperwork? I had to go down quite often lately, so did I accidentally bring up a different file?"

She placed a finger on her cheek and pondered.

Seems like that piece of paper holds what I've done with my life.

Good karma, huh? It's probably the stuff I did during that time.

"Say, did you do something for someone else's benefit in the past?"

"Who knows? Still, if you know about that, then it seems that you really weren't lying about being a goddess."

I don't really like talking about the past.

I suppose I should focus on the current situation. I didn't want to believe it, but it seems like I really have died.

So I'm dead, huh? Maybe because it still hasn't hit me, but it feels surprisingly abrupt.

A lot of things happened in my life, and to meet my end at the jaws of a subspecies of dragon... perhaps this is fate.

Even right at the end, I still couldn't cut my ties with dragons.

It's a little late to say this, but after calming down and observing her, this goddess Eris really does have a divine feel to her.

"You finally accepted it. You have more good karma than I expected, so you have two choices available after death."

She started explaining, so I guess I should properly listen.

"Option one, that's to be reborn as a human and begin your life anew. In this case, your current memories will be completely wiped."

To be reborn, huh. Does that mean I will lose all memories of the days spent in that country and start fresh?

I wonder what Lynn and the others are doing now that I'm dead... It'll be pretty galling if they feel relieved that I'd died.

"The other option would be to spend the rest of eternity in heaven together with the other dead souls."

"What's over there? There are gambling dens and bars over there, right?"

"There are no such things. Everyone exists as a soul over there, so there's no need to eat, sleep, or want for anything."

"If no one has a body over there, that means I can't fondle breasts or pinch butts or do anything erotic!"

"Of course! People spend their days living peacefully."

A world without alcohol or flesh, where everyone simply lives without doing anything.

... Isn't that hell?

What's so fun about living in a world where you can't satisfy your desires?
That leaves me with only one real option.

"You don't have to rush into this. Choosing what path to go down is a very important-

"Hello, hello? Can you hear me? Aqua-sama has revived you, so hurry on back home."

A carefree sounding voice that emerged from nowhere interrupted Goddess Eris.

That's the voice of Kazuma's party priest, right?

Oh, yeah, she could revive people, couldn't she?

"Oh, that means I don't have to die, right!?"

"Sigh... Again? Recently, the rate of death amongst the adventurers of Axel have really fallen. She immediately revives them even if they die... It's not a bad thing, but... The heavenly laws do allow you to be revived once, so you can go back to your world, Dust-san. I'll open the gate now."

With a huge sigh, she snapped her fingers.

As she did so, a white gate suddenly appeared in front of me.

"I don't really get it, but I've troubled you today. May I have a question as a memento for meeting a goddess?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"Are those breasts real?"

I pointed at those unnatural looking bumps on her chest, and Goddess Eris simply opened the gate with a smile.

"Please try not to come back for a long time. We won't acknowledge your resurrection next time."

"But Kazuma keeps boasting about coming back numerous times-"

"Now then, please try and lead a life without regrets."

The moment those words left her lips, I was forcibly pushed through the gate.

Part 3

Lynn's tear-stained face was in front of me.

Behind her, looking over with a worried expression, were Keith and Taylor.

"Dust! Duuust! You idiot! Why did you have to make me worry like that!?"

Lynn hugged me the moment I raised my upper body.

I couldn't quite gather my strength, and with the awkward position she caught me in, I couldn't do anything to prevent myself from falling to the ground once more.

I hit my head quite loudly on the ground and opened my mouth to voice my complaints, but those words died on my tongue after seeing Lynn's crying face.

If you're still here... Seems like I can't die just yet.

"Sorry."

Saying that, I lightly patted her on the head.

This is the first time I've seen her so emotional. I must have really worried her.

"*Phew.* Still, it's great that you managed to be revived. Your body was in a seriously bad way, so I was really worried."

"Yeah, even I thought it was impossible after seeing that."

Keith and Taylor said something strange.

Looking down at my body, apart from a piece of cloth around my waist, I wasn't wearing anything.

"You guys didn't pull some kind of prank on me while I couldn't resist-!"

"As if!" x2

"Then why am I naked?"

"That's because you took a really long dip in the Hydra's stomach."

"You looked like a piece of cheese after being roasted over a fire."

“... Seriously?”

I thought that my body felt strangely slimy and sticky... so you're saying that these are the remnants of gastric juices?

If my clothes have melted completely, that means... it's best not to think about that.

“Dust, be sure to thank Aqua-san. If she didn't repair your body and revive you, you would've been dead for sure..”

“Ah, right, I need to properly thank her later.”

Aqua's voice reached me even on the other side.

She brought me back from the dead. No matter how many times I thank her, it wouldn't be enough.

I can't see her right now, but I'll properly thank her after we've returned to the guild.

Part 4

After returning to the guild, I managed to get my hands on a replacement set of clothes and was finally able to bid farewell to walking around half naked.

I only had a piece of cloth around my waist. It was really drafty down there and felt disgusting.

From what I've heard, I was the only one who died there, and since I got revived, the task was completed without any casualties. Taking down such a large bounty target without any sacrifices made the guild staff very happy as well.

"We are surprisingly capable, aren't we!? Though, we wouldn't have been able to pull it off without Kazuma's party."

"Yeah! Kazuma's really amazing! We originally decided to split the rewards from the Hydra extermination quest evenly, but Kazuma's group really should get a bigger share. There's an idiot who said, 'The entire bounty can be collected by the one who finishes it off!', so they should take that idiot's share with them."

It's fine that Keith and Lynn are raving about Kazuma's abilities. I think the same way, after all.

But don't just offer them my share.

That's what I wanted to say, but the truth is, I don't have a leg to stand on.

I didn't do anything great in this fight. If there's one slight silver lining that came out of this incident... well, I suppose meeting with Eris counts as a good thing.

I'll be able to use it as a topic of conversation for quite some time, and the Eris cultists are sure to jump on it. If I play my cards well, I might even be able to make some money from this.

Oh, before that, I need to go find Aqua. I still haven't properly thanked her yet.

Looking around, I found her quite some distance away from Kazuma's group.

When I drew closer, I noticed that she was making a truly marvelous painting on the table with water.

She's seriously talented. Couldn't she make a living with this?

"Do you have a moment?"

"What? It'll be completed in just a while, so please hold on for a moment if you have some business with me."

It's the words of my saviour, so I obediently waited, and she ended up painting a picture of a hydra that seemed like it could jump out at any moment.

It's really regrettable that it will vanish after a short while.

"So, what is it? Actually, who are you?"

"I'm the guy you revived, Dust! We went on an adventure together, didn't we!? Ah, nevermind. You saved my life, so let me express my gratitude."

As I said that, the suspicious, furrowed expression that Aqua was regarding me with suddenly changed.

She broke out into a wide smile, thrust her chest out and glanced at me as though she was trying to send me some kind of signal. Is she asking me to praise her more?

"I can't thank you enough. To think that a priest capable of casting Resurrection would be in this town. I thought that in a different meaning before, but you really do exceed my wildest imaginations."

So I flattered her. She should be satisfied with this, right?

Just as I thought that and raised my head, she nodded her chin at me as if to say, "Praise me more, praise me more."

... Well, I do owe her my life, so I suppose that's fine.

"I always thought that you were an amazing person, but I didn't expect you to be this amazing. You really opened my eyes there. There probably isn't a priest as capable as you. You really are the most beautiful priest on the continent."

How's that? I pulled out all the stops. With that...

What's with that gaze? What are you expecting from me? Isn't that enough?

"I'm really grateful to you. Right, I'll see you around."

As I turned around and started heading back, I felt something grab my sleeve.

Fearfully turning around, I saw a gaze filled with desire starting up at me.



"Isn't that... enough?"

“Not yet! It’s nowhere near enough! Everyone’s been treating me like a fool ever since I came here, so praise me properly! Say it louder so that everyone can hear!”

I’ve been caught by a really troublesome person. I’m grateful to her, but anything more would just be troublesome, so I shook her off and hurried away.

And of course, her footsteps chased after me.

“Come on, show more reverence to me! Say that you’re very grateful to Aquasama for reviving you! Praise me more!”

“Ah, you’re so annoying!”

Her guardian! Where’s her guardian!?

Happily drinking while being surrounded by everyone... There he is!

“Hey Kazuma! I’m thankful for being revived, but the priestess from your party’s really annoying!”

I managed to push Aqua who was clinging onto me with a death grip to Kazuma, before making a quick escape.

Chapter 2: Setting sights on that Harem

Part 1

Even though we reached what seemed to be the deepest part of the dungeon, instead of running into monsters, the only thing that awaited us was a dust-covered room that seemed to have been the residence of a bachelor.

A simple bed stood at the side, along with a table and a chair. The bookcase next to it was stuffed to the brim, but the books themselves were too weathered to read.

There were several unidentifiable items placed under square glass cases.

There's a room further in the back, but that only lead to a bath.

This place is probably the living quarters of the mage who created the dungeon.

"What a shabby room. Here I thought we'd be able to reap some rewards after all the trouble we went through."

"Don't complain, Keith. It was already lucky enough that we were allowed to investigate a dungeon that no one else has entered before."

Taylor chided the grumbling Keith.

Keith has black hair and black eyes. With his slim body and a tuft of hair perpetually covering one eye, he could be said to be a pretty handsome man. That said, I've never seen him be particularly popular with the ladies.

His skills as an archer aren't bad, but he's a frequent skirt chaser, bad with sake, and easily gets carried away. That's probably why he isn't more popular.

Within the party, he's the one closest to me, and we often go out drinking together.

Taylor is both physically and mentally the opposite of Keith. He's tall and muscular, a serious and inflexible crusader.

"I feel oddly tired. Seems like my body isn't fully recovered yet. *Sigh*, I want to

go back and rest."

My body has felt off ever since I got eaten by the Hydra.

It feels like I still haven't gotten used to my newly rejuvenated body...

"Yeah, yeah, if you have the time to grumble, start moving your hands. A mage capable of creating such a dungeon might still have some kind of treasure hidden away somewhere."

The person who tried to encourage the two of us was the only girl in our party, Lynn.

Her red hair is tied into a ponytail. Her face still has traces of youth, but don't be fooled by her appearance. She has an extremely harsh personality, especially towards me.

"You too, don't just stand there and look, hurry up and help."

"Yeah, yeah, I just need to work, right?"

See? She's harsh, isn't she?

As a warrior, I don't think I'll be able to find anything even if I search, but I'll at least go through the motions. She'll nag at me if I don't.

"Say, doesn't this area seem a little off?"

When I randomly hit a few sections of the wall, it made a weird click.

Hmm?

Cold sweat flowed down my spine.

"Did you hear something weird just now?"

Seems like the sound was louder than I thought, and everyone looked over in my direction.

Just when I was about to come up with some kind of excuse, the earth started rumbling.

Don't tell me this is my fault?! Isn't this really bad!?

"I-I didn't do anything! Whatever happens, it wasn't my fault! This is just a strange twist of fate-Aaaah!"

The wall which my hand was pressed up against suddenly slid aside, causing me to lose my balance and fall into the newly opened gap.

“Ow, that hurt! What the hell is going on!?”

As I raised myself back up, I noticed that the space that the wall used to occupy led to a new room. It was much larger with a much higher ceiling than the room we were currently in.

Apart from a pair of doors, one on each side of the room, it was completely empty.

“It’s strangely bright in there. Is it coming from the magic item on the ceiling?”

“Seems like it. You did great to find a hidden room, Dust!”

With a loud bang, Lynn slapped me hard on the back.

“Don’t you guys know how to hold back!? Still, what kind of room is this? Normally you’d expect there to be treasure in a hidden room... but there are just two doors here.”

“There’s probably treasure behind one of the doors, or perhaps behind both. After going through all the effort to create such a large room, there can’t possibly be nothing here. It’d be great if it’s something valuable. Right, let’s start with the right door.”

Keith moved over to the right door and reached out for the doorknob.

“Be careful, Keith. We should’ve hired a thief along. Even though the guild told us that it’s a monster nest and thus there shouldn’t be any traps...”

“It’s too late to be saying that. We haven’t run into any traps so far, so it’s fine. I’ll be taking the left door then. Ah, right, I was the one who found this secret room! Make sure you remember that! If we find any treasure from this, make sure you give me a bigger cut!”

“Then, if a monster comes out, you can go deal with it all by yourself.”

“... It’s only common sense to split the rewards evenly with your companions.”

As an adult, I should make a rational decision here.

Keith and Taylor took the right door, leaving Lynn and I to take the left.

Lynn seemed extremely guarded and took cover behind me, but let's just ignore that.

"Right, now even if the door explodes and blows you to pieces, or poison gas comes out and chokes you to death, or spears come out and run you through, or flesh dissolving acid were to spray out, I'll be safe. Alright, go ahead and open it."

"What the hell are you saying! Stop saying such terrifying things! Plus, if the explosion is that strong, you'll be caught in the blast radius as well!"

"Don't say such unauspicious things. Now just standing next to you is making me shiver."

"Hey, come on, stop blushing."

Is she secretly happy to be able to perish together with me?

Thinking that, I took a closer look at Lynn's face and found a genuinely displeased expression on it.

"I'm not blushing. In the first place, I'm headed for heaven and you're headed to hell, so we'll end up in different places."

"Well, too bad. It's already been decided that I'll go to heaven too. I heard it directly from Eris-sama herself."

"Yeah, yeah, you met her back when you got eaten by the hydra. I've heard it countless times by now. Please try and tell a more believable lie."

"I'm not lying! Why the hell does no one believe me!? I really did meet with Eris-sama and talked with her! Her chest was quite suspicious, though."

"Oh, wow, how wonderful-. You'll end up receiving divine punishment if you keep making fun of the gods. Come on, hurry up and open it. Taylor and Keith are already searching the room opposite us."

Looking over to where Lynn was pointing, the door was already open and Taylor was nowhere to be seen.

Right, time to stop with all this chatter and get on with it.

I carefully twisted the doorknob, and fortunately nothing trap-like seemed to have been triggered.

I gently pushed the door open a peep and peeked inside.

"It's too dark to see anything. Can you pass me the lantern?"

"Got it. Here."

With the lantern in hand, I took a single cautious step into the room. At that instant, a blinding light came shining down from the ceiling.

"A trap!? Lynn!"

I instantly embraced Lynn and covered her with my body.

I waited for some kind of shockwave or pain to wash over me, but nothing of the sort came.

"Hey, how long do you intend to hug me for? You sure have some guts to be committing sexual harassment in broad daylight."

Said a muffled voice from my chest.

It's a voice that barely concealed her anger.

"Ah, sorry. It's not like I tried to enjoy the sensation of your chest against me only to be disappointed by the lack of bounciness or anything."

"Right, sit right there. I'll burn you to your bones."

"Wait, come on! It was obviously a joke! Stop chanting! C-Come on, now's not the time for this. Now that the place is lit, we can take a better look around the room."

Lowering her staff, Lynn slowly looked around with a scowl on her face.

Seems like I managed to somehow divert her attention for now, so let's focus my efforts on observing the interior.

There's a small spherical object amongst the haphazard pile of trash in the corner of the room. Just what is that?

It fit snugly into the palm of my hand and felt quite smooth when I touched

them.

There's a little part protruding from the top that made a click when I pushed it, but it doesn't seem to have caused any changes at all.

"Well, this is no fun."

I lost interest in it and threw it by my feet.

Now that I take a better look, this room is bigger than the room I occasionally rent out at the inn.

The wall in front of me is lined with bookcases, and most of them were filled to the brim.

"This looks like a fine bookcase. Unlike the ones outside, the books here seem to be in pretty good condition."

Some kind of writing is present on the spine of the book, but I can't understand them

I've never seen such writing before.

"What kind of language is this? There are a lot of characters in eye-catching colours... Lets flip through it."

I pulled out a book at random and turned over the page.

"O-Oh my, what a huge find!"

I understood the value of such an item from the moment I saw the page.

This is a priceless treasure!

"W-W-W-What the hell is this!?"

Lynn was screaming something, but I was too engrossed in the book to care.

This book has few words, but a lot of pictures. The only words seem to be dialogue taking place between the characters. With those pictures, even when I can't read the dialogue, I can understand the gist of what's going on.

A woman wearing clothing I've never seen before is standing in a crowded room. Everyone's wearing the same clothing, so it must be some kind of uniform.

Still, they are dressed very erotically. Their skirts are extremely short.

I turned the page.

Now, the same woman is approaching an older man in a clean looking room with a bed. And the man reached down towards the woman's skirt with a grin...

"This one too! And this! And this! Why the hell are they all filled with erotic pictures!?"

Prompted by the scream, I raised my head and saw a flustered Lynn in front of me, her face a bright red.

A number of books are strewn on the floor around her, and judging from the pictures on the covers, every single one of them is erotic.

I rapidly flipped through the book in my hand. There has be a scene where they are doing the deed, right?

This book... It's overflowing with erotic passion... I can't get enough of this.

The details on the pictures are surprising in itself, but the pages feel smooth and don't crumple at all even when I was flipping through them. It feels completely different from a regular book. Could this be a really amazing treasure?

"Hey, don't treat them so roughly. These are the treasures of mankind."

"What treasures? These are just erotic picture books!"

"You fool. These books bring forth the fantasies of men in such an exquisite manner. They'll sell for quite a sum! I can't understand the words, but even so, I can understand what they're doing."

"Y-Y-You pervert!"

She squared her shoulders and turned away.

Looks like women and children can't understand the value of this item. This is the best form of art.

"I'll take a closer look at the goods. Lynn, are you heading back to meet up with Keith and Taylor? You guys can take a break if you want."

"Yeah... I exhausted most of my mana in the fighting, so I'll take a rest."

Now that the one who'd get in the way has left, I'll be able to properly examine these books.

The dreams shown to me by the succubi are amazing too, but this book depicts scenes that have never crossed my mind before.

It'll probably increase her skill at creating dreams if I show these books to Loli Succubus. I should send a few volumes her way.

I didn't have time to properly peruse them right now, but I noticed a certain bias when I casually flipped through a few volumes.

"Aren't there a lot of scenes where the men are getting attacked?"

There are some vanilla works in there, but for some reason, it seems like a lot of them depict men getting attacked by women.

Darkness will probably happily pay for them if the situation was reversed.

The bookcases near the entrance were filled with erotic books, but the other bookshelves are filled with non-erotic picture books too.

Seems like a large variety of books are present here. This book painted with warm colours depicting plenty of children seems like it'd be right up Lynn's alley. I'll pass it to her later.

For the time being, I decided to pack a few carefully chosen erotic books into my bag. I'll need to slowly peruse those back in my room. There are quite a few of them, so I'll have to get Keith and the others to help carry it later.

Oh, yeah, I wonder what happened to them?

With my bag filled to bursting, I headed over to the other room only to find them standing blankly in front of the door.

"What's wrong? You didn't find anything?"

"Ah, Dust... Let's go home."

"Yeah. Sigh. There's no reason for us to spend any more time here."

Keith being lazy is just par for the course for him, but it's quite surprising to hear Taylor say such a thing.

Did they end up being depressed because there was nothing in the other

room?

"Don't feel so down. There's a mountain of treasure in the other room. This will definitely sell back in town."

Saying that, I brought out my favourite book from the collection and showed it to the two of them.

They moved their gaze down to look at the book... And that's it.

"Sigh."

"Sigh."

Why are you guys sighing? There's an amazing erotic picture right in front of you right now!

"Hey, seriously, what happened to you two? That's not the reaction you should have after seeing this picture! Even if you are tired, a different body part would be standing right at attention! My longsword is stiff and ready, you know!?"

"Ah, well, it is erotic."

"Yeah, it's pretty obscene."

What's with that tepid reaction?

Such a picture would normally cause men to jump for joy. Even if you are exhausted to the point where you'd drop dead, it's impossible for men to react like this.

In particular, Keith is pretty much the physical embodiment of lust. Why the hell isn't he biting?

"W-What happened? Did you eat something strange without telling me? I won't get mad, so tell me the truth."

"They're probably just tired, Dust. We had a pretty tough fight, after all. Anyway, there doesn't seem to be anything more to this place, so let's head back."

Lynn butted into the conversation, and the two of them simply replied with a listless "Sure."

Seems like something's really wrong with them. Alright, guess I'll just stuff their bags with the books and hurry back to town.

As we hurried our way back, even though the two men seemed pretty steady on their feet, all they said on the trip back were variations of "I'm tired" in a listless monotone.

Part 2

The next day, just as I was eating at my usual spot at the guild, a glum-faced Lynn plodded down the stairs towards me.

“What’s with that long face? Is it that time of the month?”

“Do you not know what tact is? Keith and Taylor seemed pretty out of it, so I told them to take a rest today.”

She sat down with a sigh and placed an order with the waitress.

“Those guys are still listless? I even gave them a few of the best volumes... They aren’t exhausted because of that, are they?”

It might not be as good as the dreams provided by the succubi, but we aren’t rich enough that we can request their services every time we get in the mood.

Those books are an unparalleled treasure to us men in allowing us to relieve our desires whenever we want.

When I gave one to Kazuma, he went,

“Hey, isn’t this a Japanese ero-manga? Where did you get these from? Are there any ones involving stepsisters?”

And practically snatched it from me.

“I see. So Keith worked too hard yesterday and wore himself out, huh?”

“That’s not it. The two of them said that they don’t want to move for a few days. They can’t get rid of their fatigue, it seems.”

“How shabby. Come on, even I am full of energy right here.”

“You’re not the only one. I too am feeling pretty normal.”

Did the two of them catch some strange disease?

Hopefully, it’s just simple fatigue. I’ll bring up something nice for them later on.

“Well, it can’t be helped. Guess we’ll be on break for a while.”

"Did you forget? You accepted a quest for the day after tomorrow, didn't you? Goblins have appeared around Hora village, so we're tasked with escorting people returning to the village and fending off the goblins. You were overjoyed after finding a proper job, weren't you?"

"Come to think of it, yeah, I accepted that quest, didn't I?"

They specified the date and were recruiting a team of around four adventurers, so we jumped on it.

We took the job yesterday because it was short term and close by, but this is the main event.

"... What should we do?"

"What else can we do? We need to recruit some temporary members. We already accepted a quest meant for a party of four."

"Even so, we do have a bit of a history with temporary members."

The temporary member that they recruited to replace me in the past turned out to be a member of a criminal organization, and almost ended up putting the party in peril.

Back then, I managed to pull through with my quick wits and judgement, but there's a chance that we'll end up getting caught in a similar troublesome situation.

"I doubt that'll happen again. The guild has become more wary of new and foreign adventurers after that incident too."

"Yeah, I don't think that's likely either. Well, for now, let's try and avoid anyone suspicious while recruiting."

"I got it. Give me a moment, I'll go consult with Luna-san."

Lynn walked over to Luna who was busy tidying up the counter, and asked something about recruiting a temporary member.

Just put up a notice on the board and wait for someone to come over, huh?

We need at least two members. It'd be best if we could get one from the thief and warrior type classes. If we could get someone who can attack from range

too, that'd be nice as well.

Well, we are somewhat famous as adventurers in Axel. I'm sure people will rush to snatch up the position and we'll end up with too many candidates to choose from. I'm sure of it.

Part 3

“No one’s coming....”

“Yeah...”

We were waiting out at the table near the windows, the temporary recruitment poster hanging off the edge, but no one seems to be coming.

There were quite a few people who glanced our way after seeing the notice on the board, but most of them grimaced shortly afterwards and none of them approached us.

We’ve been waiting since morning. It’s almost noon now.

Sitting a short distance away, the Crimson Demon Yunyun hid her face behind the menu and was looking our way like she wanted to say something, but I’m too busy to play along with her today.

She just seems to be up to her usual loner stuff anyway.

“Yeah, I suppose no one would want to join the same party as the delinquent Dust.”

Sitting across me, Lynn said that while looking at me with half closed eyes.

Is that so? If you are going to say such things, I have a few words of my own too.

“Hey, why don’t you change into something more appealing before you start blaming me? You’re lacking in both skin and sensuality. Show more of your shoulders and reveal more of your chest. They can’t expect any kind of slippage to happen while adventuring. What’s with that childish looking outfit? Do you even know what sex appeal is?”

“Oh shut up! I happen to like this outfit. It’s all because you keep committing sexual harassment and picking fights that no one wants to approach us! It’s all your fault!”

“Oh, I’m so sorry-As if! Why don’t you try flaunting your meagre assets?! There are some people who actually enjoy flat chests!”

I got involved in a really troublesome bunch with just those exact tastes a short time ago, after all.

“Oh, that’s it! I’m going to force my staff into your mouth and blast you right there!”

“Your ideas are way too grotesque! I’m the one who’s had it. Let’s take this outside. I’ll properly teach you how great I am.”

The two of us stood up. I think I could hear a soft feminine “Ah!” coming from close by, but I ignored it and went outside.

I crossed my arms and waited for Lynn, and she appeared after a short wait.

“Today, I’m going to teach you which one of us has the better-”

“Lightning!”

“That was close! Hey, don’t just suddenly start shooting magic without saying a word! You completed your chant before coming out here again!?”

“Tsk, he dodged it. Even though he falls for this every time...”

“What a crazy woman! But you’ve lost your chance. Now then, what should I do? First I’ll strip you and make you regret being born a woman!”

I extended my hands and wiggled my fingers.

I won’t give you time to chant. From now on, it’s going to be completely one-sided. You best prepare yourself.

“Please cut it out! You’re bothering the other patrons! Please do this elsewhere, Dust-san, Lynn-san!”

The one who interrupted before I could attack was the receptionist Luna, a vein almost popping from her forehead as she tried to hide her anger behind a stiff smile.

Part 4

I stuck the recruitment poster on the unsold table in front of the store.

Quite a few passerbys looked over, but they only only seemed to regard me as an interesting curiosity and not a single one of them called out.

Occasionally a child would approach out of interest, only for their mothers to hurriedly snatch them away.

“Didn’t I always say not to approach suspicious people?”

“Mommy, why are those people sitting on that chair over there?”

“Adults have their own issues too. Just leave them be.”

Giving me one last gentle look, the mother took her child and left.

“Hey... is there a point to this?”

Is she embarrassed? Lynn, sitting next to me, absentmindedly whispered while keeping her head low.

“We don’t have a choice, do we? We were forbidden from recruiting near the guild, so the only thing we could do head to crowded places and try and recruit people there.”

“Even so...”

Raising our voices and getting into a fight near the guild was really bad. As a result, we were barred from recruiting people at the guild and the surrounding area.

Thus, we had no choice but to move to a store facing the main street. I wrote on the notice that we were conducting our interviews here, so there shouldn’t be a problem.

“I don’t want to do this in front of such a depressing store either, but we don’t have a choice.”

“Then go home! Why the hell do you keep coming here to disrupt my business?”

I turned around to see the owner of the general store angrily looking down at me.

Your store is already famous for not having any customers. Stop complaining about every little thing.

“Obstructing business? What are you saying? We are recruiting party members here, you know? Interested adventurers will flood over to us, and the people who’re waiting for their turn to be interviewed might... end up browsing your goods to kill time.”

“There aren’t any. If you’re going to say that, you should remain confident till the end. Look around you. There’s not even a single person who came up.”

“... Seems like most of the residents around here are quite shy.”

“That’s not it at all. If regular people see a bunch of suspicious people gathering in front of the shop, they’ll be scared away instead. Lynn-chan, it must be really troublesome for you to take care of a man who just follows his base instincts like this.”

“Hahaha. Even if he’s loose with money and does nothing but chase skirts all day, he’s still my companion. Yeah, even if it’s him.”

“Hey, guys, at least say that kind of stuff behind my back...”

The old man shrugged and disappeared back into his shop.

Lynn, seemingly a little less embarrassed now, raised her head up towards the sky.

I followed suit and saw clouds shaped like a school of fish lazily float across.

“It sure is peaceful.”

“If it weren’t for the quest we had lined up the day after tomorrow, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to just laze around.”

“Yeah. Well, if no one ends up coming, I suppose we can just hit up Kazuma and his party. I’m sure they’re free.”

“I wonder about that. I mean, they had a lot going on even before that incident with Darkness. From what I’ve heard, they got acknowledged after

taking down the Demon King's Generals and got summoned to the capital."

"Sigh... Kazuma sure is doing good for himself."

"Are you jealous of him? If you accomplish something big, I'm sure even you might end up getting an audience with Princess Iris too."

Lynn nudged me with her elbow.

I know she's just teasing me, but hearing the word princess made me tremble a little.

"I can't say I have much interest in that. Just thinking about getting involved with royalty and the nobility gives me the chills."

Just remembering that time makes me uncomfortable.

Princess, huh...

I couldn't help but feel a sense of irony from hearing that word come from Lynn's mouth. She resembles her so closely...

"Really? I thought you of all people would jump right on that."

"Well, too bad. I'm interested in money and women, but authority is-"

"Eh? Dust-san? What are you doing here? Did you think up some kind of new scheme?"

This voice is her, right?

Looking down, Loli Succubus was standing in front of me.

She's wearing a far more conservative outfit than usual today

Yeah, I suppose they can't wear the revealing, lingerie-like outfit that they use in the store while wandering around the city. The police will probably take them in if they were to do so.

"I haven't seen your face at the store recently. Did you run into money issues again?"

"You idiot!"

Don't talk about the succubus store in front of her!

The shop that allows men to fulfill their erotic desires in their dreams is a

secret only known to the male adventurers.

"Oh, you're the girl who helped us a while ago, right? Long time no see. Anyway, what shop are you talking about?"

"Um, hello. Er, about that, the shop is, err... it's definitely not a suspicious shop of any kind..."

Don't glance at me with those pleading eyes.

Loli Succubus really is bad at thinking on her feet.

Just hearing you speak of it makes it sound suspicious.

"She gets stage fright easily, so she's really bad at talking with unfamiliar people. The shop she mentioned is a cafe that I frequently visit. Their uniforms are a little lewd, so that's one of my favourite places to go."

"Ah, I see. It might be your job, but I'm sure it's troublesome to deal with this fellow."

"Not at all. He did help us out when we were in trouble. He has a lot of problems, but he's... somewhat reliable, I guess?"

"Oh? Dust is reliable?"

I'm getting some rare praise for once.

Stop looking at me with such naked suspicion, Lynn.

"It says you're recruiting members. Did something happen?"

"Two of our companions fell ill, and we have a job lined up for the day after tomorrow. That's why we're recruiting people."

"Is that so? It must be hard on you two."

"Thanks. Oh, I know. Would you like join us? You know a spell that can control the dreams of others, so I'm sure you can cast other spells too, right? It'd be a great help if you could lend us a hand."

"No, that's the only spell I can properly cast, and I've never been on an adventure before, so I'll just slow you down..."

She's looking at me with that pleading gaze of hers again.

Oh, yeah, I think I lied that she was a beginner Mage when I introduced her to the party.

There'll only be problems if we were to bring her along, so I suppose I should give her a hand.

"Lynn, she doesn't know any spells that can be used in battle. She won't of any help even if you bring her along. Ah, how about this, if we really can't find enough people, we can call her in to fill up the roster. What do you think?"

"Ah, I'm fine with that. If you really can't find enough people, you can call on me. Now then, I need to get to work, so please excuse me."

"Sorry for holding you up. Thanks for back then~"

Lynn waved her goodbye, and, after a short bow, Loli Succubus took her leave.

"What a sweet girl. I can't believe she's your acquaintance."

"She may look like that, but she has issues of her own. But... nevermind."

"We can't take that quest unless we have four people, so if it really comes down to that, we'll have to call her up."

"I'll consider if it we really can't find enough people. Ah, someone seems to be ap...proach...ing..."

I caught someone approaching out of the corner of my eye, but when I turned to face them, standing right there was a blond-haired woman wearing a set of metal armour.

"Crap, it's you."

I know that person. She's the vanguard of Kazuma's party, the Crusader Darkness.

She has a really hot body and is unparalleled when it comes to defence, but...

"Hey, it's pretty rude to become that disappointed upon seeing someone. I saw your recruitment poster at the guild and purposely came all the way out here after hearing the details from Luna. If you need people, what about me?"

"Rejected."

I immediately refused. I've already gone through a horrible experience after getting involved with them in the past, so there's no need to even consider the offer.

"Hey, Dust! Didn't you say that you'll go ask Kazuma's party if no one shows up? You've teamed up with them in the past, right?"

"Yeah, I did fill in for Darkness back when she dropped out, but, Lynn, listen. Yes, I did say to hit up Kazuma's party. But that's only under the condition that Kazuma comes with us. The others aren't people that we can handle without their guardian around. Or, what, are you confident that you'll be able to control those wild beasts without a chain or a whip, Lynn?"

"What are you saying in front of the person in question? What, is this some kind of reward?"

Seeing Darkness blush and start breathing heavily, Lynn recoiled slightly.

Seems like she has a better understanding of just how dangerous she is now.

"Your attacks never land, your only virtue is your toughness, and on top of that, you recklessly charge into monsters on sight and gleefully take their attacks head on. Shall I go on?

As I started counting her problems with my fingers, Darkness started fidgeting in front of me.

"It's a little embarrassing to be told that again. This feels a little different from the usual embarrassment play..."

"..."

Lynn was speechless in the face of Darkness's reaction. It seems like she's at a complete loss as to how to respond.

"Besides, what happened to Kazuma? Couldn't you just go adventuring with your companions?"

"Well, after he wiped out his debt and received a windfall on top of that, he has refused to come out of his house. That man is really..."

Kazuma lost his motivation to work, huh? That means there's no longer any reason to hire Darkness.

I really do wish he'd stop abandoning those three problem children, though.

"In the first place, do you even have time for this? Weren't you acting as the lord of this town in place of your father after the old Lord disappeared? I've heard that you've been running around dealing with the various issues in his place on account of his health. Do you really have time to be working as an adventurer?"

I interrogated her to find some reason to chase her away.

"That's true, but I've accumulated a lot of stress after doing work that I'm not used to. Getting tormen... the chance to beat up some monsters would be a nice change of pace, so I thought I would accept a quest or two."

"It's too late to put on a proper front now. You only came here because the other parties rejected you, right?"

"Gurk."

Seems like I hit it right on the nail. The people with Kazuma are famous for having more than a few quirks, after all. My body wouldn't last if I were to pair up with her.

"I have no intention of hiring you. Please leave."

"Y-You better remember this. Subjecting me to such embarrassment in front of so many people... doesn't feel so bad. Am I hopeless?"

After leaving such dangerous parting words, she wandered off somewhere.

Darkness is completely hopeless.

If only she didn't have that personality, that kind of fetish, she'd be a pretty exemplary woman. It really is a pity.

"I've heard rumours of Darkness's personality before, but... You really can't judge books by their cover."

Lynn folded her arms and mumbled as she watched Darkness's back slowly fade into the crowd.

Reality can be cruel at times. Even though she has both status and great looks. What a waste.

"Oh, I wondered what you were doing to make Darkness angry like that. So you're recruiting members?"

"... Another problem child has come."

The one who appeared in her place was the explosion girl with a screw loose, the Crimson Demon Megumin.

I had a bad feeling when I heard the story from Darkness. To think that she would show up too...

"Hoho, recruiting members, huh? You're like all the bad points of Kazuma concentrated into the form of a man, but very well. I have some free time, so if you have need of the skills of the exalted wielder of Explosion Magic—"

"I do not."

I rejected her out of hand.

I'm looking for party members that I can rely on, not opening a daycare for problem children.

"I'm still in the middle of my speech! This is Explosion, you know?! The same spell that took out various Demon King's generals! Don't you have any interest—"

"Not at all!"

"Why not! This is your first and last chance to recruit a wielder of the strongest offensive spell, Explosion, into your party! Right now I'll join you for the price of dinner!"

If she's pleading with me so desperately, that means that, like Darkness, she was rejected by the other adventurers in the guild.

What the explosion girl said isn't wrong. True, I have no complaints as far as destructive power goes.

However-

"I don't need a horribly expensive spell that can only be used once. There's no need for such firepower when we are going up against goblins. Please leave."

I pointed towards the main street, but Megumin made no movements to

leave.

Glancing at Lynn out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that she had a conflicted expression for some reason.

She probably had some measure of respect for her as a mage, but after hearing of the trouble she causes every day... Yeah, that's the face I'd make too.

"Now, let's start the interview. I may not look like it, but I have a lot of experience with part time jobs, so I'm used to interviews."

She ignored my words and sat down opposite me.

You really should share some of that brazenness with Yunyun.

"I'm surprised that you can hold down a part time job with your personality."

"Eh, well, I'm pretty beautiful."

"Is that really something you yourself should say? Anyway, what interview? I already turned you down."

"Heh, I haven't lived such a soft life that I'd back down from that level of rejection. I'm not leaving unless you tearfully beg me with 'Take the leftovers if you want, just please don't come back here again!' or something of that level."

That's being way too wilful.

I need to find a way to get rid of this strangely passionate girl.

It's just a simple recruitment drive. Why the hell am I experiencing so much hardship?

"What should we do, Dust?"

Lynn whispered into my ear.

"Just leave it to me."

I whispered back.

Doesn't look like simply waiting for her to give up and go home would work. Very well, let's go through the motions of an interview. She should be happy with that.

"Right, let's start the interview. We are looking for members for an escort and

goblin extermination quest. Why don't you start with telling us your strong points?"

"My pride is my overwhelming firepower! No matter what kind of enemy I face, I will blow them away in a flash!"

She confidently stood up and struck a pose with her staff.

"I see, overwhelming firepower is your strong point. Then, if goblins suddenly charge at you from four directions, what would you do?"

And the moment I said that, her headstrong demeanour vanished as she shyly sat back down and averted her gaze.

"That's... Well...."

"Would you please properly answer the question? What exactly would you do if goblins surrounded you? It'll be problematic for us too if you don't clearly answer that. Ah, pretending to be hurt? Please stop that, it's making it seem like I've wrong you."

I repeatedly rapped on the table.

In this kind of situation, one should politely but aggressively pick at her faults.

"Oh wooow."

Lynn was looking at me with cold eyes. What's up with that? You'll be caught up in whatever trouble this girl stirs up if I don't chase her away, you know?

"Err, well, I'll cast explosion on the largest group of goblins..."

"I see. Several goblins were sent flying by that one blast. There are still over a dozen of them remaining. Please tell us what you'll do next."

"About that... Errr..."

"Please answer the question. There's no way you're going to say that you'll just lay down, take a nap, and not do anything, right? What are you going to do while your companions are struggling for their lives? If you don't tell us that, it'd be hard for us-"

Before I could finish, Megumin stood up and wordlessly hurried away.

After meeting up with Darkness, who was keeping an eye on us from quite

some distance away, the two of them seemed to discuss something.

After a short while, Megumin pointed her staff in our direction, and Darkness grabbed her from behind in a nelson hold.

... What the hell are they doing?

"Isn't that a bit harsh? You could've rejected her more gently."

"You don't know, but once you've heard of the trouble this explosion girl stirs up from Kazuma and Yunyun, you'll be extremely thankful for my what I just did."

Plus, if the explosion girl has joined us, there'd be two mages in the party. The party balance would've been completely skewed.

In an actual battle, I, as the only warrior, won't be able to carry the immobile Megumin and protect Lynn at the same time.

It'd be fine if it was just me, but I can't possibly put Lynn in such danger.

"I don't think she's that horrible."

"In the future, you should stick with their party for a time when Kazuma is around. You'll know exactly what I'm talking about. Things will probably turn out fine if Kazuma is around... Probably."

"I can't help but feel unnerved when you put it that way..."

"You'll know exactly how blessed you are to be in a party as normal as ours... Oh, come on, are you serious? Please, just give me a break already."

Another woman approached us.

Judging from the pattern, yeah, I should've expected this.

The blue-haired priest of the troublesome cult, the self-proclaimed goddess.

"You were the one I revived before... what was it again?"

"It's Dust! I told you my name just before, didn't I? Well, you really helped me a lot back then. Thanks for that."

I still owe her from she brought me back after I got half dissolved by the hydra, so I can't bring myself to be too harsh on her.

"Oh, yeah, that was your name. So, anyway, what are you doing recruiting members out here?"

"We got kicked out of the guild. Anyway, we got enough people, so we were just about to close up shop."

I should beat a hasty retreat before she starts clamouring to join our party.

Her skills as a priest are very highly praised, but as far as personality goes, she's far more troublesome than the other two, or so I've heard from Kazuma.

Indeed, back when I adventuring with Kazuma, he had his hands full trying to manage her.

I did want a healer in our party, but this girl is out of the question.

"Hold on, come with me."

Lynn stood and up pulled me over next to a corner of the shop.

"It's pretty bold of you to drag a man off to a shady spot in broad daylight, you know?"

"Stop fooling around. Why are you deciding things for yourself? That's the Archpriest that revived you, Aqua-san, right? Shouldn't we be welcoming someone that amazing?"

"You don't get it at all. Sure, her skills as a priest are top notch. I'll admit that. But she is the one that Kazuma points out as the most troublesome of the three problem children. Incidentally, I agree with his assessment."

"But she's a priest, isn't she? A member of the clergy shouldn't be too troublesome"

"You know she's a priest of the Axis Cult, right?"

The Axis cult is so troublesome that even the Demon King's army is rumoured to give them a wide berth.

A priest of such a cult is nothing but grounds for concern. Furthermore, she's an oddball who constantly proclaims herself to be a goddess.

"B-But, we've always wanted a priest in our party..."

"Yeah, as long as they aren't an Axis Cultist."

"Hey, what are you guys talking about? It's really lonely to be ignored like this, you know?"

Aqua's voice sounded from behind us.

Looking back, I saw Aqua leaning over the table and looking at us.

"Sorry, we had a little something to discuss. Anyway, if you're here for the member recruitment notice, I'm sorry, but as I mentioned previously, we already settled that matter."

"But Darkness and Megumin both said that it hasn't been settled yet."

Dammit, she heard about this from them?

Why the hell did this girl approach us after she knows that we turned them down?

"In that case, let me join your party. Even if you die, I'll be able to resurrect you immediately! I'll accept it for the cost of drinks."

That certainly sounds appealing. I've been revived by her before, so I know that she isn't lying about it.

But there are too many cons to that one pro.

"Other than that, I can instantly purify undead too."

"Sadly, we're going goblin hunting, so we don't have a need for that."

"Goblins, huh? As long as it isn't Giant Toads, I'm fine with anything! I really don't want to end up getting slimed again."

So she's bad with frogs. I should've lied that we were going frog hunting.

Unlike the other two, she has no issues as far as abilities go, so it's hard to refuse her. Should I just take her along? However...

Looking behind her, I could see the other two that I just rejected staring at us from behind a bush.

One of them might still be fine, but I have absolutely no confidence in being able to watch over all three of them.

Is there really no way to get them to give up?! Come on, there has got to be a

way... Oh, yeah, I recall hearing this before. I should give it a shot.

"The truth is, Sir Vanir has agreed to help me."

"Whaaat!? You're adventuring together with that shitty devil? What are you thinking? He's an existence akin to a patch of stubborn dirt stuck to the toilet that won't come off no matter how many times you scrub it, you know?"

"T-That's going too far. Anyway, Sir Vanir has kindly offered to accompany us. If you don't mind being together with him, you're free to come with us."

"Of course not! There's no way a goddess like me would adventure together with a devil!"

She really doesn't let go of that goddess thing, does she?

It's pretty impressive that she can keep up a lie like that.

"Is that so? Well, that's a pity. Feel free to hit us up again if there's another chance."

"It's best that you stop associating with that sort of thing. Take this as a gentle warning from a goddess."

"Yeah, I'll be sure to keep that in mind."

I waved her off as she left the table, and triumphantly punched through the air the moment she's out of sight.

I successfully chased the problem child away! Job well done! I should go back to the guild and grab a cold one.

"Well, that wraps things up nicely."

I turned towards Lynn, and she replied with a sigh.

"You know, we haven't wrapped anything up at all. We still haven't recruited a single member."

"... Ah."

Dealing with them took so much of my efforts that I completely forgot about recruiting members.

Yeah, our original goal was to recruit two members for the quest we have

lined up the day after tomorrow.

At this rate, we'll have to end up refunding the advance payment.

"What should we do? I don't have any money."

"Why don't you have any money? You just got paid two days ago, right?"

"I've already spent it, of course. Money only stimulates the economy if it gets spent, you know?"

"You just didn't think about the future at all, right? Still, this is a problem. It'd be nice if we knew some adventurers who happened to be free right now."

"Seriously, what should we do?"

"Actually, shouldn't we respond to her? I'm starting to feel sorry for her. She's been glancing at us even back when we were at the guild."

Lynn glanced off somewhere, but I already know who she's looking at, so I couldn't be bothered to follow her gaze.

"You've noticed it too, huh?"

She's been shadowing us from quite some distance away ever since we sat down in front of this store, constantly attempting to approach us only to get second thoughts halfway and head back. An extremely suspicious person caught in a loop.

She has a pretty good figure for her age, and on top of that, she's a Crimson Demon Archmage capable of wielding advanced magic.

Despite that, she always ends up operating alone, the loner Magician Yunyun.

"It's not like we are unfamiliar with each other. She could've just called out to us."

"She doesn't get along with others. It's a pretty famous rumour amongst us adventurers."

Rather than not getting well with others, it's more like she's simply bad at dealing with strangers.

Even though she's been shooting me gazes like she has something she wants to say to me.

"Hmm, I guess I'll invite her. She's just been extruding an aura of 'I want to join your party.'"

"She looks really pure, so I really don't want to let her into our party. It feels like she'll end up getting corrupted by you or Keith."

"What does that mean? Anyway, she's just here as a temporary member, so there's no need to worry about that. In the first place, Yunyun and I are already friends. Even after you rejected her."

I tried to introduce Yunyun to Lynn in an attempt to help her make friends, but Lynn read too deeply into it and turned her down.

"Obviously I'd be suspicious of a request from you. I didn't expect it to be taken at face value. I was sure you were playing some kind of trick."

"You were the one who had the misunderstanding. Even I too have occasions where I do something out of the goodness of my heart."

"Yeah, like once every year, right?"

"Should I seal those lips with mine so that they'll never talk back to me again?"

"Go ahead if you dare. I'll mail your underwear to that nobleman who likes you so very much!"

"Hey, don't do that! Can you still call yourself human?"

I don't get why she's that angry with me, but that's a no go. It was a really traumatic event for me.

Yunyun continued pacing in and out of the corner of my eye as we squabbled with each other.

Seems like she'll be stuck like this for eternity unless I call out to her.

"I'm really starting to feel sorry for her, so call out to her, Dust."

"No, wait, if we let her into the party, there'd be two mages. That would form an unbalanced party, wouldn't it?"

"There wouldn't be any issues from recruiting such an exceptional Archmage. Come on, she's starting to tear up because she doesn't have the courage to

approach us."

She's gotten pretty close a few times, but she just can't seem to take the final step.

If Lynn weren't here, she'd probably be able to talk to me without hesitation.

Fine, guess I'll call out to her.

"Oh, isn't that Yunyun? What's up? Are you here to lend me money? If you want to invite me to a meal, pick a place with good sake. Of course, it'd be your treat."

"I'm not lending you money, and I'm not treating you either. Er, I-what a coincidence. What are you doing out here?"

The way she happily ran towards me reminded me of a dog happily wagging its tail as it runs up to greet its owner.

She seems to be trying to act like she just noticed our presence, but her acting skills are horribly lacking.

Every time she tried to hide the fact that she's a loner, her acting is so bad that I can't bear to look at her. It'd be great if she could become a little more shameless, like me.

"Ah, two of our party members came down with something. We're recruiting temporary replacements right now."

"Eh-. Is that so-? That's a problem, isn't it-?"

I even gave you a hook. Should you really react that way? Why are you speaking in a monotone?

I should probably invite her right now... but in order to help her overcome her communication problems, I guess I'll keep this conversation going for a while.

Your future will be really dark if you can't overcome this by yourself.

"Yeah, it is. Well, no one is coming, so I was thinking that it's time to close up shop and go bug a couple of my acquaintances."

"I-I see. Umm, if you are in trouble..."

"Huh? You're too soft, I can't hear you. Is there something you want to tell

me? And are you sure you don't want to do that embarrassing self introduction of yours?"

"That's something like a law in my village, it's not like I particularly like to do it. Anyway, you see, umm, well, if you don't have enough people... err..."

She's looking down and playing with her fingers, but she still can't properly speak up.

Even though she is much more confident in front of me and that explosion girl.

"Stop bullying her, Dust. If you'd like, would you like to join our party for a few days? Don't worry, you'll get a share of the rewards too."

Lynn pushed me aside and butted into the conversation.

Seems like she got irritated by the back and forth that Yunyun and I were doing.

"Can I really?"

"Yeah. Can I count on you?"

"Yes! I'm not very well versed in this, but I'll be in your care!"

Yunyun gave Lynn an exaggerated bow. She must be really happy to hear that.

We are the ones who are requesting stuff off her, but it feels like the exact opposite.

"Yeah, we'll be glad to have you. Drop by the guild tomorrow... well, you're always there. Anyway, I'll call out to you, so wait for me."

"I understand! I'll be waiting!"

And she happily skipped away. Everything about Yunyun right now is just radiating happiness.

There's nothing to complain about as far as her combat ability goes. In fact, it feels like she'd be fine even if she were to go alone, but since she's willing to help us out, there's no reason to deny her.

"We managed to secure one member for now."

"The sun is starting to set, so let's continue this tomorrow. I'm sure we'll be able to get the last member somehow."

"I'm not quite sure I agree with your optimism, but it'll probably work out."

I returned the table and chair back to their original position in the store, and Lynn met with the shopkeeper to apologize about something.

It won't sell anyway, so there's no need to be that particular about it,

There's still one more day till the dateline, so let's get some dinner, grab a drink and sleep.

Worry about tomorrow's problems tomorrow.

Part 5

As I sat at my usual place in the guild and helped myself to breakfast while stifling a yawn, a certain woman sat down opposite me and glared at me.

“I couldn’t find anyone. So, regarding the incident yesterday where you said leave it to me, got into a fight some other adventurers, and spent the night in the detention cells, what kind of excuse do you have for that?”

“It’s not my fault. They were the ones who brought up the money I owed them when I tried to recruit them into the party.”

Apart from Lynn, who was pouting about being unable to secure the fourth member, there’s also a fretting Yunyun sitting at the table.

“W-What should we do? The quest requires four people, right?”

Yunyun, who was probably really looking forward to this, seemed quite worked up.

She was reading books like “The Beginner’s Guide to Your First Party” and “How to Communicate Well with Others” the whole day in the guild, after all.

She even prepared a large bag filled to the brim with snacks for use during the adventure. Well, I ate some of them in place of breakfast to lighten our load a little, and she tearfully chased me after that.

“Don’t worry, I called her over.”

I waved at the girl as she walked through the door, and she made her way over to the table.

“This will be my first adventure, so please take care of me.”

The girl was Loli Succubus. I visited her earlier this morning, and she agreed to my request.

She was dressed like a proper mage today.



A party with one vanguard and three spellcasters. This is about as unbalanced a party composition as you can get, but I just have to find a way to make this

work out.

“Sorry for dragging you along with-”

“N-Nice to meet you! I’m Yunyun, a Crimson Demon! My hobbies are games I can play by myself and reading! I’m always looking for new friends!”

Why is Yunyun so tense? This isn’t a marriage interview, you know?

She really is bad at dealing with unfamiliar faces. I can sense her tension just by standing next to her.

“Nice to meet you, Yunyun-san. I’m... Lolisa.”

That’s the fake name I came up with this morning.

It seems like Devils find it inconvenient to reveal their real names, so I thought of a fitting alias for her.

This way, even if I accidentally call her Loli Succubus by mistake, we’ll be able to easily smooth things over.

“Everyone’s a spellcaster too, right? Please take care of me, Senpais.”

“Senpai... That sounds pretty good.”

The corner of Lynn’s lips curled.

Hmm? The person who’d be most happy at being called senpai seems oddly quiet.

Looking down at Yunyun, she was clutching her cheeks with both hands and fluffing about.

“Ehehe-Senpai... I’ll have to brag to Megumin about this later.”

Seems like she’s far happier than I expected.

Wait, this just came to me, but... Isn’t this a harem party!?

Just like Kazuma’s party, there are three women and a man.

This should be a great thing for me, but...

Yunyun has great looks, but she’s way too young.

Loli Succubus is supposed to be far older than I am, but as far as appearances

go, she's the youngest one present.

That leaves Lynn. She has a harsh personality and a somewhat pitiful chest, but, well, everything else is just my type.

Still, I'll definitely receive some form of punishment if I were to complain about this situation. There are tons of sausage parties in the guild itself. This party is like heaven compared to those.

Even now, the other men in the guild are shooting me envious gazes.

Damn, this feels good.

"Right, let's get going!"

"It's really rare for you to be this motivated. You're not thinking about something weird, are you?"

"Not at all."

So don't glare at me like that. Lynn's surprisingly sharp at the strangest of times, that's why she's so troublesome.

If I impress them with my manliness right now, it's possible that Loli Succubus might introduce me to some of her more bountiful colleagues, or Yunyun to one of her few friends.

... No, I suppose it's too unreasonable to hope for that second bit.

Still, I can show off my good points to Lynn during this adventure and have her change the way she looks at me.

Part 6

“Light of Saber!”

A ray of light flashed through the monsters, neatly bisecting them.

“Fireball!”

A ball of fire scored a direct hit on a nearby monster, filling the air with the smell of barbecued meat.

Lynn, Loli Succubus and I stood in front of the carriage, watching Yunyun easily handle everything.

The enemies that we would've normally struggled against were being swept up like so much dirt.

“She’s really enthusiastic.”

“Yeah.”

I replied to Lynn who was blankly staring at this scene.

“Aren’t we unneeded here?”

“Yeah.”

I nodded in response to Loli Succubus’s genuine question.

The extremely hyped up Yunyun would immediately vanquish any monsters that appeared with a single spell, so we didn’t get the chance to do anything.

Between her high firepower and her massive amounts of mana, we could do nothing but watch as the monsters were quickly taken care off.

Crimson Demons are really amazing. That explosion girl also has some pretty impressive firepower, but, considering their overall performance, isn’t Yunyun the stronger one?

I originally intended to show off my merits in battle, but from the looks of things, Yunyun will have no problem handling all of them,,so I simply observed her together with the other two.

Once the monsters were all vanquished, Yunyun wiped the sweat off her

brow and headed back to us with a bright smile on her face.

“I’ve defeated the monsters!”

“You’re really strong. It’s really something to look up to as a fellow mage.”

“Yeah. You said you were going to become the chief of the Crimson Demons in the future, didn’t you? You certainly have the ability to back that up, number one mage of the Crimson Demons!”

“That was so cool, Senpai!”

After receiving everyone’s praise, Yunyun blushed and looked down at her feet.

Seems like she’s seriously embarrassed. She probably isn’t used to this.

I didn’t expect things to become so easy just because Yunyun’s around.

Wait, if I praise her and give her a good impression of this incident, wouldn’t she agree to help me out in the future?

With her around, we’ll be able to take down even high bounty targets. If that’s the case, wouldn’t our future as adventurers be secured?

Right, time to heap on the praise.

I sat down next to Yunyun.

“Seriously, though, your spells are really amazing. It’s the first time I’ve seen such a powerful and exceptional mage.”

“You’re exaggerating. This much is normal for Crimson Demons.”

“You’re being too humble. That explosion girl can only fire a single shot and that’s it. Compared to her, you can let loose multiple strong spells in quick succession without causing trouble for your companions. What else is that if not the best?”

“Am I really better than Megumin!? Do you really think so!?”

“Y-Yeah, you’re definitely better than her.”

“Ehehe, it makes me happy to hear that.”

It’s a lot more effective than I expected. I knew she often says that she and

Megumin are rivals, but it seems like she puts a lot more weight on that than I thought.

Comparing her to Megumin is a great way to praise her. I'll have to take a note of that.

"You guys think so too, right?"

I directed the conversation over to Lynn and Loli Succubus so they could get their own praises in, but all I got in return was silence.

Hey, come on, read the mood a little. Don't you want to give Yunyun a better impression of these events?

Turning back towards the two, Lynn was watching the scenery flow by with a frown, while Loli Succubus was glaring in our direction.

Why are you guys so upset? Shouldn't you guys be celebrating after breezing through a fight like that?

"What's wrong? Did you get motion sickness or something?"

"Not a thing~. Yunyun sure is amazing, isn't she? She's totally unlike me who can only use intermediate magic. Well, not that I really want your praise."

"Senpai is quite different from someone like me who can only use a simple trick to control dreams. So you like strong mages, don't you, Dust?"

Are these two jealous of Yunyun's performance as a mage?

There are times when I too dislike getting compared to Kazuma. Seems like I praised Yunyun too much.

I suppose I should find a stage for us to show our stuff too.

Oh, what a great time for monsters to show up.

"Ooh, nice timing, I think I can see monsters approaching us. Take a break for this one, Yunyun. We'll take care of this bunch."

"Eh, monsters? Ah, some things really are running towards us."

Detecting the presence of several monsters as well as their footsteps, I ordered the driver to stop the carriage and went outside.

There's a horde of monsters heading towards us.

"It's a goblin horde!"

A man screamed from within the carriage.

Seems like our original targets were waiting close to the village to ambush us. If we take them out here, our quest will be completed in one fell swoop.

"You guys stay in the carriage. Time to show off what we can do."

"Yeah. I've accumulated quite a bit of stress recently. Time to vent some of it."

"I'll do my best too!"

Those two certainly seem motivated. I know what Lynn is capable of, but what of Loli Succubus?

To be honest, I completely forgot to plan for our battles.

Well, in any case, my job hasn't changed. As the vanguard, I need to hold the enemy off and buy time for the spellcasters in the back to chant their spells.

There are six goblins. Frankly, it's pretty tough for me to take them all on by myself, but I need to show off my manly side now.

They'd be easy to take on if I had a spear, but it's too late for that now.

"Come at me, you bastards! I, Dust-sama, will take you all on!"

I shouted and waved my sword around to attract their attention.

Right now, our goal isn't to defeat all of them. My job is to prevent them from sneaking behind me and attacking the carriage.

The two right in front of me seemed scared by my scream, but the others quickly moved to flank me.

I managed to fend off most of their attacks with my sword, but I couldn't make it in time to deflect the club that was swung at me from the other side.

I prepared myself to receive the blow as best I could, but instead of the shock or pain that I expected, the goblin simply fell to the ground.

The goblin that fell over without taking a single wound appeared to be

soundly asleep.

“Are you alright, Dust-san? Good thing Sleep took hold.”

Loli Succubus shouted at me from behind.

So she magically put them to sleep, huh?

“Great job, Loli Succu-Lolisa!”

I gave her a thumbs up, and she blush as she returned the gesture.

“Lightning! Now’s not the time to be doing that!”

A flash of lighting flew past me, striking a goblin square in the chest and taking it down.

“Thanks, Lynn! Let’s take them all down!”

Part 7

We managed to take down all the goblins.

Taking down two of them early in the battle made a really huge difference. Additionally, it really surprised me how well Loli Succubus performed.

She doesn't know any direct damage spells, but she can use spells like Sleep and Paralyze, which contributed greatly to the battle.

"That was amazing. Thanks for your hard work, everyone."

Yunyun, who sat on the sidelines as instructed, joyfully called out as we returned.

Hearing that, the previous awkwardness of the other two vanished, and the three of them happily chatted amongst themselves.

As the only male in the party, I was completely left out.

One of the villagers that we were escorting was sticking his head out the carriage, warily keeping a lookout on the surroundings. I suppose I'll have a chat with him.

"Relax, I defeated all the goblins."

"Oh, did you really!? Thank you very much. I'm really glad we hired you! Incidentally, how many of them were there?"

"We killed six of them."

I counted off the number of bodies laying on the ground and relayed it to the villager. In response, he frowned.

That's certainly not a satisfied expression.

"What's wrong? Do the numbers not add up?"

"Yeah, according to the rumours I've heard, it's a horde over ten members strong."

"Hey, didn't you tell us that there were around five to six of them before?"

That was written on the Quest notice. The villagers also mentioned the same

figure when we talked to them directly.

"Yeah, about that, the more goblins there are, the more money we have to offer in recompense, right?"

"So you lied about the numbers..."

"I'm sorry! I mean, it's important to save money for old age, isn't it?"

"You won't get old if you end up killed by the goblins!"

"I know! I know that, but my only son doesn't work and just lazes at home all day! I can't help but worry about my savings!"

"I get! I get it, so stop crying and clinging onto me!"

I won't feel anything if a middle aged man were to cling onto me.

As I desperately tried to wrestle him off me, Lynn and the others looked over in my direction and started whispering amongst themselves.

"He's been acting really suspicious lately. It used to be that he'd do nothing but chase after skirts all day, but he's been fairly quiet lately. It all started when he got hit on by a guy not too long ago."

"Eh, could it be that Dust-san leans both ways? I've read about such men who get lovey-dovey with each other in my stories..."

"I get what you mean."

"Hey, I can hear you! Don't just spout nonsense!"

In the first place, Loli Succubus should know the reason.

My needs are fulfilled every time I make use of that store, so I won't have such strong urges for the next day.

"Well, fine. We'll leave the talk of money for later; right now, we'll see this quest through to the end."

"Thank you very much! Really, thank you very much!"

"I told you, stop clinging onto me! It's disgusting!"

"I knew it!" x3

"Stop jumping to conclusions, you guys! I'm straight! I went through a lot of

shit in the past, so this really isn't a laughing matter!"

Ignoring my denials, the girls started excitedly chatting amongst themselves.

It's nice that the three of them are getting along well, but it feels like this will end up putting me in a bad spot.

If they start swapping tales of what I've done...

"Come to think of it, back when he was with Vanir-san..."

"Eh? He did such a thing? I didn't know about that."

"And this happened too..."

No! This is seriously bad!

It was a mistake to put these three together!

"Oh, yeah, about what's up next-!"

I had no choice but to steer the conversation in another direction.

I forced myself into the group that was talking up a storm and started discussing our future actions.

Part 8

"Dust, is it really down this road? No matter how long we walk, all I see are trees."

"If you want to complain, go do it to the village chief. He's the one that said to follow this road."

After safely escorting the villagers back to the village, we got the details from the village chief and headed off to deal with the remaining goblins.

Of course, we asked for additional compensation. A person who'd risk their lives just out of the kindness of their hearts is the stranger one.

A person like me with a slacker's personality won't act without the promise of profit. I'm not like those knights who will act based on honour alone.

"Umm, there's a cave at the end of this path that the goblins have turned into their nest. We're heading to raid it in the wee hours of the morning, and my job is to put any lookouts to sleep. Did I miss anything?"

Loli Succubus recited what we explained to her back in the village.

Although she wasn't that into this originally, she seems quite pleased with herself after getting the chance to show off in the battle earlier.

She's always had a somewhat insecure side, so being useful even in this situation must have given her a sense of accomplishment.

"Um, if it's okay with you, should I take them all out with my magic?"

"It'd wrap things up really quickly if you were to get involved, but you should conserve your energy, Yunyun. If goblins are here, things might get troublesome."

"You're talking about the Rookie Killer, right? Kazuma managed to handle it somehow the last time we ran into one..."

Back when I switched parties with Kazuma, both his and my parties ran into a Rookie Killer.

A Rookie Killer is a troublesome creature that famously uses small fry

monsters like Kobolds and Goblins as bait to lure in adventurers, which it then preys upon.

It's not impossible to defeat, but it's definitely a strong enemy.

"I got it. I'll refrain from using magic as much as possible and stay on guard!"

Considering her abilities, Yunyun will be able to easily handle a Rookie Killer. Simply keeping her as insurance will allow us to focus on taking care of the goblins and take a load off our shoulders.

"Right, let's cut the chatter here. We're drawing close to the cave."

I signaled to my companions to get down and crept ahead..

Poking my head out from behind the shadow of a large tree, I scouted our destination.

"I see the entrance, but there doesn't seem to be any lookouts."

There's a hole leading into the side of the mountain, and the path leading to it appears to have been flattened.

They definitely used this place as a base. I pricked my ears, but all I could hear is the sound of grass rustling in the wind.

Did the goblins run away after losing half their members?

I signaled to my companions to hold position and moved to the front of the cave.

Peeking inside, the cave was much larger than I expected, and dried grass was piled up inside in what passes as beds for the goblins.

And above all, there's not a single inhabitant. It's an empty house.

"Hey, there's no one here. You can come out now."

We investigated the cave and the surroundings, but we didn't find a single goblin, only traces that they've been here.

"They left a lot of their stuff back here. Doesn't it seem like they left this place in a hurry? What do you think, Lynn?"

"Yeah, I think the same way. Leaving their beds behind is one thing, but I

don't think they'd leave their food behind if they had the choice."

The two of us tilted our heads as we surveyed the inside of the cave.

I understand being unnerved after your companions failed to return, but this feels like they left under much more pressing circumstances...

"Perhaps they got into a scuffle with some other adventurers?"

"The villagers said that they didn't hire anyone other than us."

"D-D-D-D-Dust-han!"

Loli Succubus called me by a strange name as she repeatedly tapped me on the back.

"Don't refer to me with such a cutesy name. I'm talking about something serious right now, so leave that till later."

"D-D-D-D-Dust-san!"

What the hell is Yunyun doing? She has a higher level, so her strength is correspondingly higher too. That actually kinda hurt.

"Like I said, use my name properly. I already told you that I'm talking about something serious, didn't I!?"

I'm properly investigating for once, why the hell does everyone keep getting in my way?

Even Lynn must be exasperated... Why is she staring behind me without moving?

Following her gaze, I turned back and saw a large, dark green creature looking at us from the treeline.

It had a large maw lined with sharp fangs and two horns extending from the side of its head.

The creature pushed aside the trees and foliage as it entered the clearing, revealing its gigantic, lizard like body.

Yes, it's the most famous, and most feared of monsters, a dragon.

"Dr-Drago-gon!? What is it doing here!?"

You're way too surprised, Lynn.

All three of them simple stood frozen in place, staring at the creature, their weapons hanging limply in their hands.

Judging from its size and the color of its scales, it's probably a fairly old dragon.

"Oh, this dragon grew up quite well."

"Why are you so calm!? It's a Dragon, you know!? The strongest monster is right in front of us!"

Lynn was trembling as she clutched at my chest.

It doesn't seem like the other two are in a much better state.

"Guess I have no choice. I'll distract him, so hurry up and run. But don't turn your back on it. Get some distance while keeping your eyes on it, then make a break for it together... got it?"

I stepped in front and signaled them to get back with my free hand.

The goblins must have run into this dragon and hastily evacuated the cave. There's also the possibility that this cave was originally the dragon's nest.

"Stop pretending to act calm! This isn't the time to act cool! You need to run away too, otherwise you'll end up getting chomped on again!"

Lynn fearfully screamed at me.

"Yeah, you should get back, Dust-san! A-As a mage of the Crimson Demons, I-I'll defeat this dragon, gain the title of the Dragon Slayer, a-and boast about it to M-Megumin later!"

It's not at all convincing when you're shaking like a newborn calf.

"You should run too, Dust-san! Who will coach me in acting if you die!? And you still haven't returned me the money I lent you!"

Loli Succubus, who had been getting a lot more repeat customers recently thanks to my guidance, seems to be genuinely worried about me.

"Ah, right, return what you owe me too!"

"You had me cover your bill the last time we ate, didn't you!?"

The three of them pulled on my sleeves as if they wanted me to escape with them.

They usually complain about me everyday, but when push comes to shove, they do have a pretty kind side, don't they?

... I'll just pretend that they didn't bring up the issue of money.

"It'll be fine, I won't die. I just happen to know a little bit about dragons, so if I'm by myself, I'll be able to do something. In the first place, did you really think I'd sacrifice myself for the sake of my companions? It's all because I have a plan!"

"Oh, yeah, that's true. Everyone, let's go!"

Lynn interrupted me as I was in the middle of reassuring them.

"Ah, yes. There's no way Dust-san would want to do something so admirable. He probably thought of something too underhanded and cowardly to do in front of us. Like perhaps Vanir-san is in hiding or something?"

"I think so too."

All three of them were immediately convinced... You know it's fine to worry about me a little more, right?

Normally, this'd be the time for me to say something cool and change the way you guys look at me.

"Oh come on, I'm begging you, just hurry up and run!"

"I believe in you!"

Lynn yelled as the three of them made their escape. Hearing that line gives me quite a bit of motivation.

Without drawing my sword, I walked up towards the dragon who was simply observing our interactions.

The dragon warily snorted and let out a loud roar.

However, there was no change in the size of its pupils, and I don't get the feeling of an imminent attack coming from it.

"Well, I stopped using this, but against a dragon..."

Without raising my guard, I approached the dragon.

Part 9

After clearing up the issue with the dragon, I headed in the direction that the three of them left in and found them surprisingly close by.

Were they too worried for me to run off?

“But was it really okay? I really don’t think that Dust-san can take on a dragon alone. I knew I should’ve stayed back too. Dragon or no, Advanced Magic will definitely be able to do something!”

“Stop it, he’ll probably be fine. Dust doesn’t get up to anything good and seeks an easy life by cheating and deceiving others, but he does have some hidden depths.”

“Hidden depths? I don’t think there’s anything else to him apart from the heart of a pervert.”

It’d be kind of awkward for me to appear now.

I should hide myself and observe for a while longer.

“Well, I do agree, but... No, that’s not it, it’s like, how do I say this, sometimes he gives off a different feeling. I can’t put it very well, but it’s like every so often, he starts seeming like a proper, stand up guy... I do think that I’m seeing things sometimes.”

“Is that so? My image of Dust is someone who spends all day hitting on girls with his friends, getting drunk, and getting into trouble.”

“I have a similar impression. All he does in the store is stare at butts with a perverted look on his face. But... Lynn-san has spent the most time with him, so maybe you noticed something that we missed.”

“It’s more like he just keeps clinging onto me. It’s not like I understand him because I want to.”

The three of them exchanged glances and shared a wry laugh.

Those guys sure are shooting their mouths off.

Though, stuff does come to mind whenever they point it out, but I won’t

apologize!

“Can’t you guys worry a little more about me?”

“Ah!”

The three of them exclaimed at the same time as I revealed myself, and for a moment there I swore I could see them tear up a bit, but it was soon replaced by an expression of relief.

“You came back earlier than I thought. What happened to the dragon?”

“You don’t need to worry about that. It seems like it got into a fight with some other monster or some adventurers recently. There was a sword stuck in its foot, so I removed it, and it gave this to me.”

I tossed over a bag containing some precious metals and gold that I got from the dragon.

Dragons are known to collect shiny items, so there are occasions where people receive a ton of treasure after defeating one. There are quite a few people who seek to challenge dragons with fame and riches in mind.

It’s not very well known, but there are intelligent dragons who aren’t particularly belligerent towards humans, so simple trades and deals such as this can be cut with them.

“Eh? You reached an understanding with it!? I’ve heard that there are dragons who are particularly intelligent, but... So it was true after all. Well, there’s a story about a Dragon Knight who fights on the back of a dragon in a neighbouring country, so this isn’t that unbelievable.”

“I know of the story of the Dragon Knight too! I heard it from Alice-chan before! It’s the story where the son of a lower ranked noble family managed to qualify for the rare class of Dragon Knight at a young age, right!? I’ve heard that he’s the strongest spearman in the country, handsome, dependable, and the perfect ideal of a knight!”

Yunyun’s eyes were shimmering as she excitedly said that. She’s way too into it.

“Dragon Knight. The strongest spearman in the country, huh?”

Lynn was looking at me like she had something to say.

“Handsome and dependable, huh? Hey, doesn’t that sound like me!?”

“Not at all.”

Yunyun’s and Loli Succubus’s voices overlapped.

Lynn still regarded me with a suspicious gaze, but eventually mumbled, “Nah, that’s not possible,” and sighed.

“Well, it doesn’t matter. Anyway, there’s quite a bit of stuff in that bag. We’ve really hit it big this time!”

With that much money, I’ll be able to replace the clothes and equipment that I lost during the fight against the Hydra.

“So it was a friendly dragon... Here I thought that it was finally my chance to become a dragon slayer... I wanted to see Megumin’s envious face...”

Everything always ends up being about Megumin, doesn’t it? You could say it’s because she’s especially conscious of her rival, but it seems like they’re closer than that.

“Isn’t it fine that everyone’s safe? With this, the quest is complete.”

Loli Succubus seems to have a bit more confidence after this adventure. She’s certainly a little bolder than she was before this.

It ended up being a bigger deal than I expected, but the cave is quite some distance away from the village. Even if the dragon holes up in that cave for a while to lick its wounds, it wouldn’t cause any issues.

It’s a pretty sharp dragon, after all. It wouldn’t purposely go out of its way to antagonise us humans.

“Well, let’s go home. It went pretty well for our first party, didn’t it?”

“Yeah, it somehow went better than it usually does.”

Lynn and I shared a smile, and turned towards the other two...

“With this, Megumin won’t be able tease me about that! Even I can find a proper party and go on one or two adventures together!”

"So this is how adventures are. It's been an educational experience. I'll use this experience and improve the authenticity and lewdness of my dreams. Then, one day, I'll become the number one..."

These guys weren't paying attention at all, were they?

The two of them were completely lost in their own worlds.

Bah, it doesn't matter. Let's just leave them be.

"It's quite different from what I had in mind."

Kazuma was always alone with a party of three girls. I'm in the same position now, but I can't say it's been a totally pleasant experience.

There are things that you won't understand unless you've personally experienced it.

"True companions are really great to have, aren't they?"

Being surrounded by three girls certainly isn't easy.

I've finally experienced the troubles that Kazuma goes through.

I guess I'll treat him to a drink with the money we earned today... While I'm at it, let's invite Keith and Taylor too. I'm a little concerned as to how they are holding up.

Chapter 3: Sightseeing at that Hot Springs Town

Part 1

“Dust, do you have a moment?”

I was roaming the town, searching for pretty women and ways to make easy money like I usually do, when I heard someone call out to me from behind.

“Oh hey, Kazuma. What’s up?”

A weak-looking, plain faced man greeted me as I turned around.

He looks to be a weakling no matter where you’re coming from, but it wouldn’t be much of an exaggeration to say that he’s the most accomplished adventurer in this town.

In addition, he’s also my best friend.

“Are you in a rush?”

“Nah, I’m quite free right now. Ever since I got revived by that party loving priest of yours after that hydra gulped me down, my body hasn’t been feeling great. I’ve been taking a little rest since then.”

“Oh, yeah, that did happen a couple of months ago. You still haven’t recovered from it? This is lucky, then. I won a few vouchers for a hotel in Alcanretia from the raffle that the shopping district was hosting. It includes traveling expenses. So, you interested?”

“Seriously!? Of course I’m interested! Alcanretia is the city of hot springs and water that is famous as a health resort, right? Gimme!”

“S-Sure... It makes me feel a little guilty when you’re so eager...”

“What, is there some kind of downside to this?”

Kazuma smiled wryly.

It's probably something like the inn is haunted, that's why it's so cheap or something like that. It's the shopping district that the petty owner of the general store is part of, after all.

"Rather than downside, it's more like the inn and the entire town is... Well, the town might actually be quite a good fit for you."

"Then there's no problem, is there? But, is this really okay? Not that I'd return it even if you ask me to."

"Y-Yeah, we already went there once. We don't really want to go back there..."

"Ah, I see. Visiting tourist spots once is more than enough, right?"

"...Yeah."

Kazuma averted his gaze and sighed.

I've heard rumours that he visited that town quite some time ago. He went with the usual three girls and the beautiful shopkeeper of the magic item store that Sir Vanir was working at.

There's no way nothing happened when visiting a hot springs resort with such a group, but when I asked him about it, he would just become listless and say 'I don't want to remember it...', so I didn't pry any further.

Normally you'd expect something enviable to happen during such a trip, but judging from his reaction, not only did something like that not happen, but he ended up experiencing something really unpleasant over there.

Well, that's to be expected with those problem children.

The crazy Archpriest who would boldly proclaim herself to be a goddess.

The crazy Archmage who thinks of nothing but releasing her Explosion.

And the crazy, total masochist Crusader who couldn't land any of her attacks.

"... It's been hard on you."

"So you do understand!"

He tearfully exclaimed when I gently patted him on the shoulder.

I knew it, he must have experienced something really horrible over there. It's no surprise that he wouldn't want to go back.

"Seems like the shopping district has an abundance of vouchers, so I got eight of them. You can take all of them if you want."

"Oh, thanks. I'll gladly have them."

So, eight people, huh? Keith, Taylor, Lynn, and I takes four, so that leaves four more slots.

A number of faces appeared in my mind, so I guess I'll go invite them.

After inviting my party members... Yeah, he'll probably be in that magic item shop.

Part 2

“Guys, this is a little sudden, but we’re going on a trip the day after tomorrow.”

I told my party as we were having a meal at our usual spot at the guild.

I expected them to act a little more surprised, but they simply continued eating after throwing me a doubtful glance.

“Hey, hey, shouldn’t you guys say something? I’m doing this to help cure Keith and Taylor too!

Come on, at least show me a little courtesy!”

“Dust, before we talk about taking a trip, do you even have the money required to pay for it? We haven’t scheduled any quests recently, so we have the time, but you don’t have the money, do you? You’re the only one who didn’t get any rewards from the Hydra battle, after all.”

“I used the money you got from selling the dragon’s treasure to repay your debts, so don’t expect anything from that.”

“Oh, thank you so *very much* for repaying my debts for me!”

“Don’t mention it.”

I said through gritted teeth, and Lynn returned with a laugh.

She said that she would sell it for cash, so I trusted her with it, but she used it to repay my debts. before I knew it.

Well, I incurred some new debts after those were cleared, so things haven’t changed much.

The three of them stopped eating and fixed a suspicious gaze on me.

“You can relax on that point. I won’t ask you for money. It’ll be my treat!”

I proudly declared.

Taylor let out a small chuckle and returned to his food.

“Hey, if you won a windfall through one of your games, then go repay your

debts. You weren't up to anything criminal, were you?"

"Dust's really bad at gambling, so there's no way he made a windfall with that. I'm sure he got that money through some underhanded means."

"Why the hell do you think I can only earn money through gambling or criminal acts!? I've still got quite some money from selling some of those porn books! And I got vouchers from Kazuma that cover lodging and travel fees!"

The moment I said that, my companions instantly perked up.

"You should've said that earlier. Where's the destination?"

"As expected of Kazuma-sama. How many nights are we staying?"

"It's nice to go for a little R&R every once in a while."

"They sure got energetic all of a sudden..."

They ignored my grumbles and started talking animatedly.

Seems like everyone intends to join. That makes four people.

Right, I guess I'll go invite that person who takes care of me every day.

Part 3

At a certain famous Magic Item shop in Axel.

“Fuhahaha! You sure have an admirable attitude, debt-ridden adventurer!”

Sir Vanir responded as such when I offered him the voucher.

I wanted to offer an invitation to the beautiful shopkeeper too, but it seems like she's out to make some purchases. Plus, I've heard that she went with Kazuma the previous time, so I think I'll pass on inviting her.

“Sir has helped me a lot in the past, after all. This seems like the perfect chance to repay you for that.”

“Were Moi not a devil, such an act would've raised my affection points by quite a bit. Very well, Moi shall accept your offering. The city of hot springs and water, huh. That foolish town that would get involved with that layabout goddess. Moi has always wanted to see it with my own eyes.”

“Who exactly are you calling a layabout goddess?!”

The one who interrupted the conversation was the girl who was fiddling around with various items in the store, Kazuma's Archpriest, Aqua.

Despite being on bad terms with Sir, it seems like she spends quite a bit of time in this store..

“I'm referring to the girl who nonchalantly comes here to drink tea without buying anything and badgers the incompetent shopkeep daily. Yes, the self-proclaimed, blue-haired goddess with a truly pitiful brain.”

“Oh, this place was a shop? I've never seen any customers here, so I thought it was a rest stop or something. My bad~”

Aqua cutely tilted her head and clasped her hands together, trying to provoke Sir Vanir.

“Certainly, there are no customers here, merely trash and pests.”

“Sir, doesn't that mean...”

"Umm... Does that include me..."

I think I heard someone else's voice along with mine, but it was probably my imagination.

"Hah!? Who are you calling a pest!? You're a devil! You're even lower than pests!"

"Unlike a good-for-nothing like you, Moi routinely tidies the rubbish, chases away crows, and has a good reputation amongst the neighbors. Don't lump me together with you who does nothing but drink in the guild all day."

"Grrr! Devils like you should cause some trouble for the residents so I can purify you!"

"If you're talking about causing trouble, shouldn't we first talk about your troublesome religious organization that encourages swindling and the use of forceful methods?"

"I can accept you speaking badly of me, but I won't forgive you for speaking badly of my children! That's it, I'm mad now! I'll send you back to hell right here!"

"You're offering to send me back to my homeland without charge? Well, this might be the first time something good came out of your mouth, you source of all evils!"

Both of them seemed fairly on edge as they slowly inched closer to each other.

This is quite a dangerous situation. They might have some... interesting personalities, but there's no denying that both of them are quite skilled.

I'll definitely be dragged in if they go wild here.

"Oh, yeah, Kazuma was looking for you earlier. He was saying something about hiding things from him."

"I wonder what it could be? Ah, don't tell me that Kazuma found out that I was using his jacket as a tablecloth before I washed it? Hmp, seems like you got lucky today. I'll let you off this time."

After saying something that you would never expect to come out from a

priest's mouth, Aqua hastily left.

"Don't ever come back again, you goddess of misfortune! Where's the salt!?"

Vanir leaned out the door and angrily shouted towards Aqua's quickly retreating back.

A priest being treated as a nuisance by a devil... What has this world come to?

"Oh, Sir, that layabout goddess you were talking about earlier is referring to the Goddess Aqua, right?"

"Oh, yeah, you don't know. Don't worry about it, it's but a trifling matter. Anyway, about the hot springs trip, I see some interesting things down that path, so you can look forward to it."

"That just makes me more anxious, Sir."

I can't ignore the words of the Devil that can see through all.

After all, I ended up going through something horrible after he said something similar in the past.

"It's not just bad things that will happen on the trip, you know? Hot springs means mixed baths. It seems that you have some expectations on that front. Worry not, those expectations will be met."

"Seriously, Sir!?"

"Delinquent whose head is filled with desires that cannot be shown to others, if Moi says anything more right now, it might end up bringing disaster upon you."

Sir was looking somewhere behind me as he said that. I followed his gaze and saw Yunyun sitting by the window and looking at me suspiciously.

I didn't notice her presence until now.

"Oh, you were there? So you've improved your loner powers to the point where you can erase your presence completely. That's amazing."

"You're not praising me, are you!... No, nevermind that, what were you guys talking about just now? It seems like you're looking forward to the mixed baths, but the only women who'd use them would be those of quite a ripe age. There

aren't that many young girls who would make use of them."

Yunyun was looking at me with contempt.

What she's saying might make sense, but it doesn't sit well with me to be talked down to by a girl as unknowing of the world as Yunyun.

"Hey, you were holed up in the Crimson Demon village before you came to Axel, right? You're telling me to trust in your knowledge of the world? Have you never thought that what you know of might be wrong?"

"What are you saying? Common sense should apply wherever you are! At the very least, I can say I'm better than Megumin!"

"So you're saying that the Crimson Demons have the same way of thinking as the rest of the world?"

"... When you put it that way..."

I've heard that Yunyun was regarded as an odd one amongst the Crimson Demons.

Generally speaking, Crimson Demons have a different set of values and way of thinking as compared to the rest of the world. A prime example is that Explosion Girl.

Standing out in battle is the utmost importance to them, and introductions need to be done in that embarrassing, bombastic fashion. That's their common sense.

Despite having been raised in such an environment, Yunyun is surprisingly sensible. Thus, she's very vulnerable when attacked from that direction.

"As a friend, I'm really worried about you. You'll just needlessly embarrass yourself if you don't understand the common sense of the world. And given how shy you are around others, there's no way you'll be able to learn this by talking to people, right? That's why I'm explaining this to you."

"You're more of an acquaintance than a friend, but I'll thank you for your concern."

This girl is really gullible, to the point where it seriously worries me.

... But I'll make use of that personality of hers in this case.

"Mixed baths have been trending recently, and it's highly recommended that young women make use of them. It's important to take care of your skin when you're young. Apparently, having their skin seen by men makes something go boom and brings out their luster."

"Your explanation seems haphazard and isn't convincing at all. I can't see it as anything but the product of some perverted scheme. In any case, it has nothing to do with me."

"It does have something to do with you. I still have a whole bunch of the vouchers that I gave to Sir. Would you like one?"

"Eh, you're offering one to me!?"

She seems really surprised. Doesn't seem like she expected that.

When I handed one of the vouchers over...

"Wow! It's a little strange for Dust to offer something like this, but it's the first time I've been invited on a trip together with a large number of people. I need to write this in my diary later!"

Her eyes were shimmering as she said that.

She was quite excited when I invited her on an adventure a couple of days ago, so this wasn't entirely unexpected, but still, I didn't think she'd be this excited.

... She's so overjoyed that I felt a little sympathetic for her.

She happily stared at the voucher in her hand for a while, grinning from ear to ear, but she suddenly looked up at me with a fearful expression on her face.

"Ah, don't tell me you have your eyes set on me!? I'm not that easy of a woman!"

"I have no interest in that kid-like body of yours. If you say that you would like to enter the mixed baths, the other women might let their guard down and join you. I'm betting on that scenario!"

She doesn't have a bad body, but she's way too young for me to make a move

on her.

It'd be pretty nice if she were two years older, though.

"It's a relief to hear that you aren't interested in me, but that's infuriating too!"

"Then what do you want? This is why women are so troublesome!"

I've always been bad at dealing with women.

"I'm honestly happy that you invited me, but there's no point in trying to trick me. No matter what you say, I'm not entering the mixed baths."

"Do as you wish."

Despite her complaints, Yunyun certainly seemed quite pleased about this whole affair.

After telling her the date of the trip, she said 'I need to make preparations!' and happily skipped out the door.

"The girl who's reached the zenith of loners seems to be in a good mood. As a friend, Moi should offer my gratitude. As thanks for that and driving that party goddess away before she caused a ruckus, take this with you."

Sir took a small marble off the shelf and placed it on the table.

It felt slightly squishy in my hand as I touched it.

"Oh, do be careful with that. It will create a large quantity of smoke when it hits the ground. It's not dangerous, but those that inhale the smoke will fall in love with the user. Yes, it's an item that grants the desires of men."

"Huh!? Such a dreamlike item is... You're kidding! Sir, can I really have this? Not that I'd return it even if you asked me to."

"Devils do not go back on their word. Make good use of it. However, it will not work on a complete stranger. One must have a certain degree of familiarity with the target in order for it to work. Keep that in mind..."

Sir seems to be saying something, but I wasn't really paying attention right now.

I quickly ended the conversation and flew out of the store.

"Right, then, next is... Oops, hey."

As I walked down the main street, deep in thought, I suddenly received a bump to my shoulder.

Seems like I ran into someone while I wasn't paying attention.

"Hey, watch where you're going. Well, if you're a young girl, I might consider treating you gently... Wait, you're the guy from-"

That voice sounded vaguely familiar, so I turned around, and the three men immediately averted their gazes.

I only saw their faces for an instant, but I feel like I've seen them somewhere before...

"Say, have we met before?"

"It's probably just your imagination, right, boss?"

"Idiot! Don't call me boss!"

They were whispering something amongst themselves. Well, I have no interest in the secret conversations of men, so I bid them a 'Oh, is that so? Sorry,' and carried on.

Normally I'd stick with them to try and wring some money out of, but I'm only focused on how to put that marble to use right now, and that would be time I can't afford to waste.

"Anyone who breathes in the smoke in this thing will fall for me, right? That means I need to find the proper scene to use it. Dropping it in the women's baths or a bar seems like it'd be interesting, but it won't work unless I'm acquainted with them..."

In other words, the best time to use it would be when a lot of women I know gather together.

In order to create such a situation, I'll put the remaining two vouchers to good use!

"That's the only way."

I'll use the vouchers to invite women that I know on the trip. Once they are all

gathered, I'll use the marble to make them all fall for me. That's a pretty good plan, if I say so myself.

The only problem is who those two people will be.

The only female acquaintances that come to mind would be the other adventurers, but I'm not particularly well acquainted with them.

We have surprisingly little contact despite being fellow adventurers. Female adventurers in particular tend to keep their distance from me for some reason, so our relationship only really extends to trading the occasional greeting.

Those three girls popped up in my head, but I immediately pushed them out. I'll leave them to Kazuma.

"Just two more left. I'll have to carefully decide on who to bring."

"Um, Dust-san, can you stop mumbling while pacing in front of the store?"

Hearing a familiar voice, I looked up and met the eyes of Loli Succubus, who was sweeping away dirt outside the cafe.

Seems like I subconsciously walked over to the succubus shop.

"You, huh... even if someone with such few curves were to fall for me..."

"You sure are saying something very rude all of a sudden. No matter what happens, I won't ever fall for Dust-san, so rest assured. The only one in my heart is Vanir-sama!"

Come to think of it, most of the succubi are big fans of Sir.

Vanir is quite highly ranked compared to the succubi, so it seems like a lot of them look up to him.

This girl will undoubtedly want to come along if I told her that Vanir is coming with us. It'd be quite easy to bring her along; the question is if there's any benefit for me to do so.

"Do you get along well with the other succubi?"

"Where did this come from? Well, we get along well enough. They've been asking me for tips on how to create better lewd dreams lately."

"You seem pretty proud about that, but isn't that due to my help?"

It's true that the quality of their dreams have been increasing lately. I'll acknowledge that.

But that's only due to the advice that I've been sharing with Loli Succubus.

"Er, when you put it that way... But unlike you, I have a lot of friends. Yeah."

"I have a lot of friends too. There's Taylor, Keith, Lynn. Kazuma. Then there's Yunyun, and... and..."

"Who else is there?"

"Wait. Hold on a minute! There are definitely others! There's a whole bunch of guys who help me out with my schemes!"

"Those don't really count as friends, right? I have a lot of friends~ I'm on good terms with the other Succubi, and I'm familiar enough with the various adventurers that I've shown dreams to that we'll engage in small talk when we run into each other on the street."

It's the complete opposite of Yunyun.

Well, now that I think about it, it's probably to be expected for Loli Succubus to have better interpersonal relationships than Yunyun.

She doesn't have a very good figure, but she's friends with the Succubi with sexier figures. If I make her fall for me, I can get her to introduce me to her friends later.

Yeah, that can work!

"Right, I'll give this to you."

"What's this? A voucher for a trip to Alcanretia? Umm, I don't have any money right now, so I'm not buying it."

"I said I'll give it to you, didn't I? You've helped me out quite a bit in the past, and you're giving me a big hand at night too, so this is just a little thank you for that."

"This smells really fishy. And, Alcanretia is that city, right?"

Don't pick it up with your fingertips like you're holding something dirty.

Why the hell can't anyone just accept a person's goodwill?

"Well, if you don't want it, I don't really mind. Sir Vanir will be accompanying us, though."

"I'll go! When is it!? Is it today!? Tomorrow!?"

"C-Calm down! I get it, so calm down!"

After somehow calming Loli Succubus down enough to tell her the date, she immediately ran off from the shop.

"I have to buy some clothes that look like they'd catch Vanir-sama's eye!"

I heard an excited voice from somewhere down the street.

I'm a little jealous of Sir Vanir's popularity, but she'll probably thank me for this, so I consoled myself with that.

There's only one voucher left.

A girl who's on good enough terms to accept an invitation from me, huh?

Just then, a certain figure appeared in my mind.

Right now, there's a lack of women with erotic bodies. If I manage to invite her, the entertainment value I'd get from the mixed baths will be doubled.

Well, she probably won't accept, but nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Part 4

“Megumin! Listen to this! Someone invited me to go on a trip!”

“Did you fall victim to some kind of suspicious salesman? Or did someone pressure you into buying it? I’ll go with you, so let’s get your money back.”

The two crimson demons were excitedly chatting in an alleyway next to the guild.

It feels like I’ll just be dragged into a whole host of trouble if I were to call out to them, so I think I’ll just scoot by.

“I didn’t buy into any strange sales pitches or anything! A guy gave them to me as a gift!”

“And who is that guy? He probably said something like, ‘I’ll be your friend, so let’s check into the inn together,’ or something like that, right? You really should stop following strangers just because they show you a little bit of kindness.”

“Just what kind of person do you think I am, Megumin!?”

“An easy woman.”

“That applies more to you! That person who properly invited me...”

“Look me in the eyes when you say that! I’ve heard some rumours that you’ve been getting close to a blond-haired delinquent recently, but those are just rumours, right!?”

They were arguing about something pointless.

Megumin was vigorously shaking Yunyun who refused to meet her gaze, and in return Yunyun nervously responded with excuses.

It would’ve been fine to just say that you got it from me.

“I bet the whole invitation thing is a lie anyway. You probably got anxious after hearing about me and Kazuma sharing a bath together, that’s why you came up with this fantasy, right? You don’t need to worry over that... After all, it’s too early for you to become an adult.”

"T-That's not it at all! I did get invited! Don't give me such a gentle expression while saying that!"

Ignoring those two, I entered the guild and headed straight for the counter.

After arriving in front of Luna who was in charge of the reception, I stared down her cleavage.

This angle provides a really clear view of her peaks. It's the best!

"Dust-san, do you have some business here?"

She was smiling as she said that, but there was a strange intensity behind it.

She also covered up her cleavage, so I gave up and talked to her.

"You sure work hard every day. Isn't it tiring to be dealing with such troublesome matters day in and day out? I'm sure your shoulders and back are aching right now."

"Please stop saying sexually harassing stuff right off the bat. Well, if a certain someone would stop getting into fights with the police, stop getting arrested for perverted actions, and stop attempting to swindle others, perhaps I'd have a slightly easier time of it."

"There's such a person? I'll properly lecture him the next time I see him."

I confidently responded with a bright smile, and Luna responded with a long sigh.

Seems like she's accumulated quite a bit of stress.

"Oh, forget it. Anyway, why are you here today? Are you here to pick up a quest?"

"No, that's not it. I came here to see you today. How would you like to take a trip with me to a hot springs resort?"

"Huh? Where did this come from? If you're here to hit on girls, please do it elsewhere. Even if you weren't joking, there's no way I would be able to take such a long time off. What's that about a trip? Are you teasing me? Are you provoking me? Is playing around with me really that amusing?"

The smile disappeared off Luna's face, and she leaned over on the counter as

tears started welling up in her eyes.

"I want to go on a trip or two too! Just handling the complaints and issues of adventurers takes up all of my time, and my precious days just keep slipping by! My colleagues keep getting married and retiring, whereas I'm still here, all alone..."

A constant barrage of complaints spewed forth from her mouth. Looks like she really does have a lot of stress built up after all.

In such a situation, my opinion is unnecessary. All I need to do is listen and nod. This is the proper way to respond as told to me by Sir Vanir. Thus I was totally exhausted by the time she let me go. The desire to invite her has completely vanished.

I collapsed into the seat by the window and laid down on the table.

"I'm done. Seriously, who cares about the remaining one..."

There's no need to use all of them up. It's fine even if there's one left.

"Say, do you mind giving one of those vouchers to me?"

Looking up at the sound of a familiar voice, I met eyes with a silver-haired thief girl with a scar on her face.

"Aren't you the thief who was quite close to that masochistic knight and got her panties stolen by Kazuma?"

"Don't describe me that way! I'm Chris!"



"Ah, right, that was your name. Anyway, where did you hear about the vouchers?"

"After the ruckus you caused with Luna-san, anyone would've heard about it."

Oh yeah, she was half crying and screaming about stuff like wanting to visit a hot spring and take her time rejuvenating both her spirit and body, wasn't she?

"You want the voucher? Well, here you go. Do as you wish with it."

"Huh? You're giving it to me without prying for details? I have some business in Alcanretia, so, is this really fine?"

"At this point, even thinking is a chore. Burn it or sell it or use it as toilet paper, I don't really care."

"Ah. Well, I'll gratefully accept it. I have some business to attend to, so I might be late, but don't bother waiting for me if that happens."

It's too bothersome to reply, so I simply waved her away and laid down on the table.

Well, I managed to give away all the vouchers. Now all there's to do is wait for the day itself.

Running through the list of women that I managed to invite, I noticed a certain commonality amongst them...

"It's full of girls with few assets. Seriously, Yunyun's the most well developed one out of all of them..."

I had one less thing to look forward to on my hot springs trip.

Part 5

As I waited at the shelter for the carriages with my party, the other members slowly turned up.

“T-Thank you for inviting me on this trip! T-This is a simple gift, but...”

Yunyun, who showed up with a luggage big enough to fit a person, started handing out courtesy gifts to the others present.

You could say that she's being polite, but it's more like she's just plain unused to meeting others.

“You don't need to go that far.”

“Oh, we haven't really had the chance to talk, have we? I'm Keith.”

“I should introduce myself too. I'm Taylor the Crusader.”

“Thank you for your polite greeting. Um, I am-”

Seems like my companions and Yunyun are getting along well. It'd be nice if she becomes a little less of a loner after this.

Oh, yeah, it's been a week since Keith and Taylor fell ill, hasn't it? Apparently, they felt extremely lethargic and couldn't gather up the will to do anything.

Well, they've recovered a fair bit by now and seem to be looking forward to enjoying this hot springs trip.

“It appears Moi is a little late. Lecturing that inept shopkeeper took up more time than Moi anticipated.”

“It's fine for them to wait a little while for Vanir-sama!”

Oh, that sounds like Sir and Loli Succubus.

A masked man in a tuxedo and a girl who seems to be a little more spirited than usual.

Looking at things objectively, it'd be easy to mistake them for father and daughter.

“The man who didn't get much sleep last night owing to anticipation of the

use of that item, is this everyone?"

"Please keep that a secret, Sir! I did invite someone else, but she said that she'll meet up on location so there's no need to wait for her, so we can set off now."

I really hope this ends up being a fun trip.

"Wait, first, we need to handle the division of carriages. There are two four-seater carriages available, so one of them will be me, Lynn, Yunyun, and Lolisa."

"Hell no! You'll be the only one surrounded by women in that case! You went and fooled around with them on an adventure before, didn't you!? This is so unfair! Why the hell are you the only one who gets special treatment!?"

"I-I get it! I get it, so stop wiping your snot and tears on my clothes, Keith!"

I tried to fend Keith off as he clung onto my clothes.

Taylor didn't say anything, so it seems like he's fine with that arrangement.

Sir Vanir appears to be enjoying the dark emotions flowing from Keith.

And the girls are...

"Let's decide with drawing straws or rock-paper-scissors. That'd be fair."

"I-I think that's a good idea."

"I agree with that! Let's go with drawing straws!"

Drawing straws or rock-paper-scissors, huh?

Heh, this is all within my expectations.

"Oh fine. I thought this might happen, so I prepared the straws in advance. There are ones with red tips and ones that are blank, so we'll split up with this."

I took out the straws from my bag.

"You're pretty well prepared today, huh?"

"You girls can go first."

Saying that, I offered them to Lynn.

It was all I could do to hide my smile as they reached out for the straws.

– There's a little trick to these.

Every single one of them has a red tip. I'll let the girls pick first, and I'll go immediately after them.

After that, all I have to do is to get rid of the evidence somehow and I'll have a trip surrounded by girls to look forward to.

"Ah, mine's red."

"Mine's red too. Please let me be with Vanir-sama. Please let me be with Vanir-sama. Please let me be with Vanir-sama..."

"Me too! I brought a lot of games with me, so let's play them in the carriage!"

Right, now all I have to do is quickly draw one of them and get rid of the evidence.

"It's quite uncanny that the three girls ended up in the same group. Anyway, I'll go next..."

Just before I could draw a straw, someone grabbed my hand from the side.

"Hey, what are you doing, Keith? Let go of my hand."

"You did something to these straws, didn't you, Dust? I'll be going next."

Dammit, did he notice the trick?

He was with me at the gambling den quite a number of times, so he probably picked up on it.

"L-Let go! I didn't do anything!"

"Then let me go first! If you didn't do anything, it shouldn't make any difference!"

As I was struggling with Keith, the straws slipped from my grasp and fell to the floor.

And of course, every single one of them had a red tip.

"I knew it! I'm confiscating these!"

"Dust, this won't do. We're redoing things from the start."

"Underhanded Delinquent, isn't there a better way to go about doing this?"

Keith held me in a nelson hold while Taylor lectured me.

All of my plans are for not... or so you'd think.

I made eye contact with Loli Succubus and nodded.

"Right, I'll handle the straws this time. I'll leave one of them red and the rest will be blank. You girls are fine with how things currently stand, right?"

Saying that, Loli Succubus cut the tips of three of the straws with a knife.

With this, I won't be able to pull off any tricks... that's what most people would think.

Everything that happened so far is within my expectations.

Naturally, I had already secured Loli Succubus's support in advance.

I want to travel together in a carriage with the girls. Then I'll use the item and enjoy the three of them fawning all over me.

In return for Loli Succubus's cooperation, I promised that I'd arrange for her and Sir to share a room.

"Why don't we have Dust go first? Let's get this over and done with before he has the chance to come up with any more tricks."

No one thought that she'd be in cahoots with me, so nobody objected.

Yes, they fell for it.

We already arranged for the red straw to be the leftmost one.

I reached out towards that leftmost straw-

"One moment, Underhanded Delinquent. Allow Moi to go first."

"Wh-Sir!?"

"There is no particular reason behind it, Moi simply felt like going first. There's no reason to scuffle about the order, is there? Not unless you have some kind of trick up your sleeve..."

Sir had a slight smile as he said that.

Did he see through my plan? Oh, yeah, he's the great devil that can see the future, isn't he?

I tried to secretly plead him to let me off, but...

“What kind of strange dance are you doing? It’s a little too early for the festival, you know?”

Shit, Sir likes to taste dark emotions, doesn’t he?

Watching me sweat like this must be like a delicious appetizer to him.

There’s nothing more I can do but place my hopes in Loli Succubus.

“Are you going first, Vanir-sama!? I recommend picking this straw!”

Don’t just smile at him and offer him the red straw!

Weren’t you on my side!?

Part 6

“Say, why is there no one here but men? It’s all because Dust did all those unnecessary things!”

“Shut up. In the first place, I’d be enjoying a trip surrounded by women by now if you didn’t get in my way!”

“Please cut it out. Seriously, give it a rest and behave yourselves.”

A tired sounding Taylor tried to calm Keith and I down.

After that, Sir pulled out the red straw, of course, and the rest of us men had to spend the journey cooped up in the same carriage.

“He’s probably surrounded by women right now. Ahh, I’m so envious...”

“Don’t say that, Keith. It’s not like we can do anything now. Ah, screw it, I guess I’ll just take a nap.”

There’s nothing I could do, so I decided to just sleep it off.

We ran into a few monsters along the way, but between Yunyun’s magic and Vanir’s mysterious beams of light, they were quickly taken care off.

There’s a vast gulf between their abilities. It’s good that we had an easy trip, but apparently that wasn’t anywhere close to Sir’s true powers.

... I need to make sure never to make him angry.

As the sky began to darken, the carriages stopped and made preparations to set up camp.

We should be able to reach Alcanretia around noon tomorrow.

The carriages formed a circle around the fire that we built. With this, they’ll be able to act as barricades against any potential monster attacks.

After having dinner, we men didn’t have much to do amongst ourselves, so I thought that I’d turn in for an early night.

The girls on the other hand seemed to be having a lively conversation by the fire.

Women sure love to talk, don't they?

... Wait a moment, they're all gathered together. This is the perfect chance.

I took out the marble I received from Sir. All I need to do now is approach them in a natural seeming manner and drop it.

"What's wrong, Dust? Aren't you sleeping?"

"Not yet, I have something I want to talk to them about. You can go ahead and turn in first, Taylor."

"I see. Well, Keith already fell asleep, so try not to cause too much of a ruckus... And don't try to do anything perverted."

"I won't do that!"

After confirming Taylor lying down out of the corner of my eye, I slowly wandered over to the girls.

Come to think of it, how strongly do I have to throw it for it to break?

Judging from how it feels in my hand, it seems pretty flexible. I'd probably have to throw it fairly hard to break it.

Naturally start a conversation, then throw the marble against the ground as hard as I can.

... That's totally suspicious no matter how you look at it.

"What are you doing? Do you have some business with us?"

I arrived before the three of them without realizing it.

Right, first off, start off naturally.

"The weather is pretty nice, isn't it?"

"It's completely pitch black out there."

Looking up, it's too dark to tell what kind of weather we are having.

I messed up my first step, but I can still salvage this.

"Ah, well, about tomorrow's plans, is there anything you want to do after reaching Alcanretia?"

"You're thinking about the hot springs, right? Sorry to disappoint, but we won't be entering the mixed baths."

Yunyun hurriedly averted her gaze as Lynn said that.

She probably told them that I was obsessed with the mixed baths.

"Huh? I have no interests in looking at breasts that may or may not even exist. If you really want to show them off to me, I can look at them from below while licking with my tongue-"

"I'll rather die than let you see them. Actually, go die, you pervert!"

"Such actions are against the law!"

"It's best to keep that sort of things in your dreams."

Such reactions are within my expectations.

In fact it's going pretty much as I imagined it. Now, I'll raise this marble while pretending to stretch.

"Hey, you don't have to go that far! Ahh, fine. Guess I'll do a little light exercise before turning in. One, two, three, four."

Right, now all I need to do is throw this marble against the ground.

Aiming for the center of where they are gathered, I threw the marble with all of my might.

"Ah! Where did this wind come from!? *cough cough*"

Just before the marble broke, a strong gust carried a bunch of dust through the camp, causing everyone to close their eyes.

As a result, they didn't see what I did.

Yes, yes, this is great! With this, my harem is complete. I wonder what these girls will do now that they are heads over heels for me.

"Hey, don't you girls have anything to say to the great Dust-sama?"

Saying that, I looked down towards the three... only to find them looking at me with a gaze of scorn.

Huh? Isn't that odd?

"What are you saying? Have you been drinking? Don't just barge in while we're having some girl's talk. Come on, go over there. Shoo shoo."

"Yeah. I always looked forward to talking about matters of romance with other girls before heading to bed."

"... Please go someplace else."

This is completely different from what I've been told.

Weren't they supposed to fall for me after breathing in the smoke from the marble?

Smoke did come out, so... could it be that the gust earlier dispersed it?

Ah, dammit! I should've waited till they were indoors to do this instead of rushing it!

Forget falling for me, they look like they might be seriously ticked off right now.

"Yeah, yeah, seems like I was just in the way. Fine, I'll just go to sleep."

This was a one in a lifetime chance, and I just wasted it.

In the first place, I didn't even know if that item even worked at all. There's a high chance that it was defective from the start.

"Guess this is it. *Sigh.*"

Returning to where Taylor and Keith were sleeping, I spread a blanket over the ground and collapsed into it.

I should've been enjoying a glass of beer while surrounded by three girls right now. Dammit.

"What's wrong? It seems like something's eating you."

"Did you get into a fight with them?"

Taylor and Keith asked, apparently having been awoken by my arrival.

They had a genuine look of concern on their faces.

"Yeah, what I really should be looking for is male friends. Women are no good."

"Ah, of course, women are no good... Hanging out with us guys is the best."

"I agree. Hanging out with men is better than women. It's easier for men to understand each other... and it also feels better."

Are the two of them trying to comfort me?

Normally they'd be making fun of me... Friends are great things to have, aren't they?

"Yeah, yeah! Friendship between men are the best... hey, why are the two of you shifting closer to me?"

"It's a little cold out tonight, right? It isn't too bad for us men to huddle together every once in a while."

"Let's warm ourselves up. While we are at it, we can comfort each other as fellow men..."

The two of them slowly shifted closer from both sides.

Is it just me, or do their eyes look bloodshot? And it feels like their cheeks are redder than normal...

Seeing that reminded me of that time with Lynn-Yes, it's the same sort of expression that the noble had.

"W-Wait a moment! Cut it out with the jokes!!"

"I've always thought that your firm butt was quite impressive..."

"I like guys with huge pecs..."

"Stop saying such scary things! Seriously, don't say things that'll change the way I look at you!"

The two of them approached with crazed eyes.

Backpedaling, I felt my back run up against something hard.

Turning around in a panic, I saw Sir Vanir standing there.

"D-Don't tell me Sir is aiming for my ass too!?"

"Moi has no gender, thus Moi is not interested in such matters. Still, this has turned into an interesting situation as I expected. You truly are a man that I can

never grow tired of."

Sir Vanir had a smile playing upon his face as he said that. It seems like he's well aware of what's going on.

"Sir, this is different from what you told me! It didn't have any effect on the girls at all, and then these guys started acting weird!"

"There was a gale, wasn't there? Seems like these two ended up breathing in quite a bit of the smoke and went into heat. That inept shopkeeper surprisingly bought a functioning item for once."

"You used me as a test subject!"

"Fuhahaha! Don't get that angry. From what I've read, this is a fine item. It will take some time for the effects to show if a small amount is breathed in, but if someone inhales a large amount of smoke at once, it would cause their emotions to go into overdrive. If someone of the same sex were to breathe it in... The effects will probably wear off after about an hour."

I listened to what Sir was saying as I kept the two crazed beasts at bay with my sheathed sword.

Seeing men panting heavily as they approached me is far scarier than any monster I've faced.

"They'll be in this state for an entire hour!?"

"Do try your best to get away. If you were caught by them, Moi cannot guarantee that your ass will come out of this incident intact. The great devil that sees through all so declares-

I ran away from the scene without waiting for Sir to finish his sentence.

"Why the hell does this keep happening to me!? Just what did I do!?"

"Though, if a person of the opposite sex were to breathe it in, it would take time for it to come into effect, and it should last one or two days..."

Sir seems to be saying something else, but I don't have the luxury of paying attention right now.

The monster infested plains are far safer than this place is right now!

I'll escape from these two even if it kills me!

Part 7

"Hey, why do you guys look so tired? I think I saw the three off you run off somewhere last night, but what did you do?"

I'm riding the carriage together with my usual party today.

Keith and Taylor are completely slouched into their seats in the carriage. As for me, I'm so tired that even answering that question was too bothersome for me.

"Well, I had a really strange dream last night. I really don't want to recall it."

"You too, Taylor?"

The two of them chased me in a half naked state for over an hour.

I ran with more desperation than I ever did while fighting monsters, but they eventually caught up to me. Fortunately, before they could do anything, they mysteriously fell over and started snoring.

I couldn't possibly leave the two of them out there alone, so after some effort, I managed to drag them back to their sleeping spots.

Conveniently, the two of them think that it was all a dream. There's no need to tell them the truth.

"Did you have a weird dream too, Dust?"

"Y-Yeah. Let's leave it at that. I don't really want to think about it."

Even after they've regained their senses, just looking at them put me on guard.

I'd be able to accept it somehow if they were women, but why the hell did it have to be them?

In the end, none of the girls breathed the smoke in, so it didn't work. Even if it did work, the effect would've long faded away by now. Just like these two.

"To think the three of you would get nightmares on the same night. Lolisa can use a dream controlling spell, right? Maybe you should get her to show you

some good dreams tonight. Oh, yeah, you should drink some water, Dust. You look really pale."

I resigned myself to being made fun of, but to think that Lynn'd be concerned for me.

She even moved over to me and started fussing over me.

...Is she planning some kind of trick or something?

Seeing this level of concern from her is uncanny. She has to be planning something.

"Ah, thanks for the water."

Well, it'd be scary in it's own way if I were to earn her ire here, so I guess I'll just go along with it for now.

Our hands briefly touched as she passed the cup over to me.

"T-That wasn't on purpose! It really was just a coincidence!"

"I know that. I wouldn't get angry over something of that level."

Nevermind getting angry, she even gently covered the part where we made contact with her other hand... The hell?

Just what is she plotting?

Taylor and Keith have both nodded off due to their fatigue, so they didn't pick up on Lynn's unusual behaviour.

This is scary. This is really scary! Watching her behave with such kindness is really strange!

I tried to get help from Taylor and Keith, but they didn't stir at all.

Afterwards, Lynn stuck close to me and chatted over various things.

Keeping her possible motives at the back of my mind, I tried my best not to be swept up by this strange atmosphere in the carriage as we rode on.

"Dust, Dust, Alcanretia is in sight!"

Lynn enthusiastically slapped me on the back as she leaned out the window.

She's in surprisingly high spirits today. I might be imagining it, but it feels like

we've been having a lot more bodily contact. She's even happily clinging onto my arm. Seriously, just what the hell is going on?

Looking out the window to distract myself from this inexplicable fear I was feeling, I was greeted by a breathtakingly beautiful sight.

A sea of blue topped buildings as befitting the city of water spread out before me, and the labyrinth of waterways spread throughout made the entire city give off a blue shine.

"Ooh, it really is a beautiful place. As expected of the famous healing resort. I should bring back a nice souvenir for Kazuma."

"Yeah, we should properly thank him. Why don't we go shop around for a souvenir later?"

Lynn showed me an unblemished smile. I've never seen her look at me in such a gentle way before.

And she just invited me to go shopping with her...

"Hey, what's up with you? Is this some kind of new trick? Every time I tried to go shopping with you, you'd say something like 'you'd just buy some sake on your own and get me to treat you, so no' and decline."

"You really don't understand a woman's heart, do you, Dust? I just want to cheer you up, that's why..."

She's looking at me with upturned eyes. Wait, could this situation be... It can't be!

Can it?

My popular period... No, could it be that the marble actually took effect?

Considering her actions so far, that certainly is the most likely explanation. However, wouldn't it have worn off by now?

Lynn was coughing back then, so perhaps she sucked in a bit more smoke than the others and thus allowed the effect to persist.

No, I'm sure that's what happened! Please let it be the case!

That changes things. There's only one course of action a man can take in such

a situation.

“Well, if you feel like it.”

Towards Lynn’s slowly approaching face, I-

“We’ve arrived, Dust-san!”

As the door to the carriage suddenly flew open, Lynn and I hurriedly distanced ourselves.

Yunyun and Loli Succubus were standing before the open door.

The two of them greeted me with bright smiles, but, when their gaze met Lynn’s, for the briefest of instants, those smiles faltered.

It could’ve just been the trick of my eye, but it felt like they were staring daggers at her for a moment.

They were getting along so well together when I saw them last night. Did something happen?

Nothing good ever comes out of getting involved in the quarrels of women. It might be best to keep my distance for a while.

“Oh, so we have. Let’s head to the inn first to drop off our luggage.”

Keith and Taylor plodded their way over to the inn. I think they’re talking to someone in the distance. Most likely, they are asking about recommended sights and the like.

“Hmm? The steam from this hot spring is... Ouch! Vanir-sama, this steam stings when you touch it!”

“So this is the city of layabouts, Alcanretia. As expected of the city that worships that brainless goddess, it has a most deplorable air about it.”

The residents of the city who heard Sir’s remarks started glaring at us.

I can feel some extraordinary killing intent in those gazes.

And it’s not just one or two of them. Pretty much everyone around us is staring daggers at Sir Vanir.

“Don’t do that, Vanir-san! Most of the residents in this city revere the

Goddess Aqua-sama. If you say such strange stuff, they'll really start picking on us!"

Yunyun hastily looked around, her face completely drained of blood as she repeatedly bowed.

Wait, didn't she just say something really amazing just now?

"Hey, Yunyun, what did you just say?"

"Hmm, you mean what they'll do? They'll do some really amazing things! You can't let your guard down even if it's a child. They'll do stuff like purposely not adding ice to your drinks, rearranging your shoes after you've taken them off, and giving you the only charred piece of meat when you order—"

"That's some really petty acts of revenge! No, wait, that's not it, didn't you say something about worshipping the Goddess Aqua or something?"

"Ah, that. Most of the priests of the Axis Cult make their residence in this city, and most of the population are members of the Axis Cult."

"Whaaat!? This city is full of people like Kazuma's bothersome Axis Priest!? Hey, you knew about this before, right? Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

I've gotten involved with Axis cultists before, and there wasn't a single proper one amongst them.

You're telling me that this place is their headquarters?

As I drew near, Yunyun blushed and averted her gaze.

"Y-Your face is too close! Umm, well, about that... It felt like this trip would be cancelled if I told you about that in advance. It's my first time traveling with so many people... even if we're traveling to this city, I was still really looking forward to it..."

So she choose to come on this trip due to her loner personality, huh.

Ah, well, I'm directing my complaints at the wrong person. Plus, it's encouraging to know that someone has survived after visiting this place.

"Oh, fine. This city might have a lot of Axis Cultists, but it'd be fine as long as we don't get involved with them. The Axis priesthood might be full of strange

people, but the average worshipper probably won't be as bad."

There's no way everyone in this town is the likes of that Banquet Priest or that sinful priest I ran into back during that incident with Mitsurugi's sword.

I'm a little concerned as to why Yunyun continued to avert her gaze, but there's no way there'd be another person on that level.

An old lady approached us with a face full of smiles.

"Ara, are you people here to sightsee too?"

"Yeah, we are on the way to the inn..."

"Then take this with you. This is a discount coupon. If you write your name here, you can turn it in for various services at the inn!"

The piece of paper she presented to me has a line meant for my signature.

Everything else is covered by the old lady's hands, so I can't read it.

"Could you please move your hand? I can't read what's written on it."

"Now, now, men shouldn't care about stuff like that. Now, come on, write your name here."

Such actions are quite reminiscent of the techniques that money loaners use when they want me to sign a document.

Don't worry about the details, just sign on the dotted line.

It's probably some kind of scheme to trick tourists into buying some expensive goods.

"Right, well, lend me a pen so I can write down my name."

"Ah, sorry for not noticing. Here you go."

Taking advantage of the instant when her attention was diverted, I pulled the piece of paper out from her hand.

The only things written on that piece of paper were simple terms for the discount. There isn't anything particularly suspicious about it.

"What did you do that for? There's nothing to it, right? Come on now, take this pen and sign here."

My instincts are telling me that there is something suspicious about this old lady's enthusiasm is getting me to sign.

Perhaps there is some nearly invisible small print on that piece of paper.. No, there doesn't seem like there are any.

Could it really be just a simple discount coupon?

"Sorry for doubting you. Right here is fine, right?"

"Yes, right there. It might be a little hard for the ink to come out, so push strongly, yes, strongly on it when you write."

She's putting a lot of emphasis on that point.

Hmm... Isn't this paper a little thick? Could it be...

I grabbed a corner of the paper and turned it over.

Another piece of paper is stuck to the underside of the discount coupon, which I peeled off.

Written on that are the words 'Axis Cult recruitment form'.

"Fuck off! I ain't signing that! That's carbon paper, right!? I almost got tricked into the Axis Cult!"

"Oh, could you already be an Axis Cultist? You have the smell of a comrade on you."

"Don't lump me together with you! Go elsewhere! Shoo!"

I shoved my hand in her direction like I was chasing aware a stray dog.

To think that the first person I talked to upon entering this city would be a religious solicitor...

"You guys should be on your gua-"

"Oh my, has your skin gotten rougher lately? Give this a try! This is made out of all natural ingredients, without any trace of impurities that would damage your skin! Just rubbing it on your skin will make it flawless. It's made out of water from the hot springs! The very same water that's extremely effective when thrown at undeads and devils."

"Hey there, you seem like a person overflowing with the aura of loneliness. Have you heard about this water? Drinking this will increase your luck with both friends and money. It's said that it will easily attract lovers too."

"Handsome masked man and the beautiful young lady over there, are you guys enjoying life? If there's anything that is stressing you out or leaving you unsatisfied, why not join the Axis Cult? As long as it has nothing to do with undead or devils, the Axis cult will accept anything... Hmm? Something's off about you two..."

I tried to warn them, but my companions were already surrounded by a crowd of people, pestering them to join their cult or trying to peddle some suspicious items.

The suspicious smile on the face of the man talking to Sir Vanir and Loli Succubus vanished and was replaced by a doubtful frown, and the bottom of Sir Vanir's mouth twitched unpleasantly in response.

My other companions got caught up in the crowd that has formed around us and looked towards me with a pleading expression.

"You're in the way, get lost! We ain't joining the Axis Cult, so piss off! And stop selling stuff too! Don't just bottle up the water from the hot springs and sell it!"

I yelled, but the crowd didn't disperse at all.

Perhaps having somehow determined that she was the easiest target in our group, the crowd was unusually thick around Yunyun.

"Ah, I do want friends, but sorry, that's a little... eh, if I join up, everyone in the cult will become my friend..."

"Don't get recruited that easily! Hey, move!"

I grabbed Yunyun's hand and pulled her out of the crowd.

Perhaps because it's stuffy being surrounded by so many people, Yunyun's face was flushed as she looked up at me.

"Thank you, Dust-san."

"Seriously, don't fall for that kind of recruitment pitch. You have the air of a

pushover about you, so you need to be a little more firm.”

“Yeah, I suppose... Though, you’ll help me out just like this when I get in trouble, won’t you?”

Looking up at me with slightly damp eyes, Yunyun cheerfully laughed.

Seeing this sent shivers down my spine.

Normally you’d complain about sexual harassment or what not every time you see my face, so what’s with this gentle expression you’re showing me?

“You hatched some kind of scheme together with Lynn, didn’t you? What, are you going to start screaming about how hungry you are when we pass by a high class eatery and beg me to treat you? Or, what, are you angry about the money I begged of you to cover the tab at that roadside bar?”

“I don’t care about that. After all... aren’t we close?”

Saying that, Yunyun pushed her body onto my arm.

She might be a brat, but she’s pretty well developed, so when she presses her body against me like that...

“Hey, I’m not that easy to trick! This is way too good to be true! You learned about the effects of that marble from Sir, that’s why you’re putting on an act to mess with me, right!? Let’s hurry up and drop our luggage off at the inn!”

Untangling myself from Yunyun, I pushed my way out of the crowd of people and headed off to the inn.

After fending off waves of salesmen hawking flasks of bottled hot springs water and suspicious-looking gems, we met up with Taylor and Keith, who had their pockets stuffed full of Axis Cult recruitment forms, and finally reached the inn.

“Moi was prepared for this, but still, what an unpleasant city this is. There’s barely a shred of dark emotions amongst the residents, yet visitors to this town are overflowing with such. Moi can understand why even the Demon King himself doesn’t wish to get involved with this town.”

“Um, they say that bathing in the waters of the hot springs will make your skin flawless...”

Sir has been in a bad mood ever since he came to this city.

Loli Succubus on the other hand has been trying to get as close as she could to the hot springs without getting hurt. She's been standing at the entrance to the hot springs ever since we reached the inn.

"Right, lets have some free time after dropping off the luggage. Is that fine with you, Sir?"

"That is fine. Moi shall tour the streets of this city. Perhaps moi shall play with the foolish townsfolk who worship that useless goddess."

"O-Oh. Do try not to take it too far. I'll go enjoy the hot springs. I'll be using the mixed baths, of course!"

I boldly declared in a voice loud enough for everyone in the hall to hear.

If the marble actually worked and the girls weren't just messing with me, they'll definitely join me in the bath.

"Oh, the mixed baths, I see. Well, do as you wish, I'll take my stuff up to my room."

"Ah, I'll go visit the rooms too."

"See you later, Vanir-sama."

The girls disappeared off to the rooms without any particular reaction.

See, I knew they were just messing with me.

The rooms are set up such that each room houses two people. Originally, Lynn and I were supposed to share the same room, but they ended up changing the room assignment after the straw drawing incident, so I ended up in the same room as Vanir.

After dropping off my luggage in my room, I changed into clothes more suitable for bathing before heading back down again.

In front of the baths were three entrances, one labeled men, one labeled mixed baths, and the third labeled women.

Of course, I walked into the mixed baths without hesitation.

"Well, not like there'd be any women in the mixed baths anyway."

Despite saying that, I harboured a small smidgen of hope as I opened the door into the hot springs proper.

There was no one else there.

Well, it is in the middle of the day, after all. I suppose that's to be expected.

"It's almost like I reserved the entire place for myself. Well, I guess I'll take my time and relax."

After rinsing myself off, I submerged myself into the hot springs up to my shoulders and lazily gazed around through the steam.

A wooden wall could be seen at the edge of my vision. The only obstacle between the mixed bath and the women's bath...

"Still, the easiest explanation for the strange behavior of those two today would be that the marble has taken effect, but no matter how I think of it, it's way too suspicious. Sir Vanir pulling some strings to make me think that the marble has worked, only to pull the rug out from under me at the critical moment to bask in my dark emotions... To be honest, that is the most likely scenario."

I know full well that the marble actually does work from last night, but they've long since come back to their senses.

Is it possible for the effects to linger?

"Well, who knows. I should've properly listened to what Sir had to say. Ah, well, it's too late for that now."

Going down this line of thought would just be a waste of time, so I pushed it to the back of my mind and swam over to the wooden wall.

I tried searching for a peephole or the like, but I couldn't find any.

"Maybe I can at least overhear something."

I pressed my ear against the wall, but I only received silence in return.

"I wonder if Lynn and the others will come in if I wait a while. Ah, if only I brought a knife or something, I could've made a hole myself."

Just as I was mumbling that, I heard the sliding door to the bath clatter open.

It's probably some dude or an old geezer, so I glanced over without much expectations, but...

The person that entered was Yunyun, wearing only a towel barely enough to cover her important bits.

"Ah, Dust-san, what a coincidence..."

"Fuweh!?"

I let out a strange squawk in my surprise.

It's hard to make out her expression through the steam, but she seems to be glancing my way with a bashful expression. In any case, she doesn't seem surprised at all.

Yeah, she really has a great figure... no, wait!

Just what the hell is going on!? This is going way too far for a prank!

Could it be, is she actually serious?

"Um, if it's not too much trouble, c-can I join you?"

"A-Ah, sure, just do as you wish."

Dammit, my voice is wavering from the excitement.

Haven't I seen plenty of sexy ladies at the bar and the succubus shop?

The contents of the dreams that they show me are far more exciting than this, so why the hell am I getting so nervous?

After testing the temperature of the water with her toe, she slowly entered the pool.

I couldn't take my eyes off her at all.

"Umm, well, err... Can I come over there?"

"Er, well, s-sure, why not?"



Yunyun slowly made her way closer through the rising clouds of steam.

Her figure became ever clearer, until it feels like I could just reach out and touch her.

The sound of me gulping resonated through my head.

"It's a strange feeling, being this close to a naked man..."

Her skin was shining due to the moisture from the steam, and her face was blushing a bright red.

Looking up at me with wavering eyes, she let out a bashful giggle.

W-What should I do here? Is it proper to make a move here?

No, no, wait, she's a kid. Why the hell am I getting excited about this?

"Err, uh, have you gotten better at interacting with others recently?"

"Not at all. The only person I can act this boldly towards is you... Dust-san."

This is bad. The way she bashfully says such things is really making my heart skip a beat.

Not even the girls at the bar have said such things to me before.

Is it fine? Is it really fine? It's only proper for a man to take the initiative here, right!?

No, shit, I need to clear my head. Keep calm, me, keep calm.

Just as I was desperately trying to calm myself down, the sliding door slid open again with a clatter.

Both Yunyun and I turned towards the entrance, and standing right there was Lynn, clad in nothing but a towel.

Meeting her murderous gaze, the lightheadedness that the hot springs and this situation bestowed upon me vanished in an instant.

"Why is Yunyun in the mixed bath?"

She said it in a soft voice. Shit, that's the tone she only uses when she's really angry.

"I-I'm free to enter the mixed baths when I want. Besides, didn't you say you had no interest in the mixed bath, Lynn-san?"

"I just felt like it! I didn't expect the two of you to be here!"

Hearing the sharpness in her tone, Yunyun let out a frightened squeak.

This is bad... She's really dangerous when she's angry.

The number one survival trick for adventurers is to identify danger quickly and make a run for it.

Slowly, I distanced myself from Yunyun.

"Ah, are you two stealing a march on me!? No fair! I want my skin to become flawless too! I even resolved myself to brave the steam to come here!"

Loli Succubus burst through the doorway without even a towel to cover her up.

However, for some reason, her important bits are covered up by steam, so I couldn't get a good look. Dammit, what the hell is up with that?

This is getting complicated.

It would seem like the textbook definition of a harem, but it was completely different from what I imagined.

"You girls just recently got to know him, right? I'm the one here who's been with him the longest!"

"T-That has no relevance to this! In the romance novels I've read, the one who's been with the male lead the longest frequently loses!"

"I'm the one who is most familiar with Dust-san's preferences!"

The three of them were clinging on to me as they argued.

It's hard for me to believe this dreamlike development actually took place, but it seems like those three actually fell for me.

Thank you, Sir Vanir!

There's only one thing I can do in such a situation.

"Come, now, let's not fight over me. Why don't we all just get into the bath together? For now, Yunyun can take my left hand, Loli Su-Sa can take my right hand, and Lynn can take the one that's lef-"

“You can shut up!”

“...yes.”

The three of them scolded me at the same time.

I could only watch as their argument heated up even more.

“Oh screw it, now that it’s come to this, we’ll just have to settle this through brawn. I’ll make Dust mine even if I have to blow you two away!”

“Don’t look down on me! I’m the one who will be the future chief of the Crimson Demon clan! Do you really think you can best me!?”

“I’ll put you all to sleep!”

Everyone’s preparing to cast magic.

Crap, this is bad. If I don’t find a way to calm them down...!

I dashed over to the washing area and splashed a basin of cold water upon them.

“Kya, it’s cold!”

“W-What are you doing, Dust...-san...”

“Ouch, it hurts! Why is my body growing numb?”

I think Loli Succubus is overreacting a little, but it seems like everyone’s calmed down a little at least.

They were looking at me with a slowly stiffening gaze. Is the water too cold, I wonder?

Still, it looks like I’d be able to get through to them like this.

“Okay, okay, I understand how you feel about me. Why don’t we take turns in thirty minute intervals, starting with Lynn?”

I proposed a compromise with a smile on my face.

And the response I got was

“DIE!”

Before being pelted by a barrage of magic from the three of them.

Part 8

“Ah, looking up at the sky while taking a bath feels really great.”

The sun shone brilliantly on this cloudless day.

My entire body hurts, but I have to be thankful to even be alive right now.

“So you’ve fallen this far. Your dark emotions are delicious indeed.”

Hearing Sir’s voice, I turned towards it and saw the tuxedo clad form standing on a platform at the edge of the hot springs.

“What exactly happened, sir? They were under the effects of the marble, right?”

“Up until just now, at least. If a small amount of smoke is inhaled, the effects will gradually express themselves, and the duration of the effect will also be increased.”

That’s why they only started acting strangely in the morning, unlike Taylor and Keith.

If only I knew about that from the start, I could’ve enjoyed a lot of different scenarios.

“Ah, dammit, what a waste.”

“Still, weren’t your desires granted?”

“Well, yeah, I did end up in a mixed bath, but please, Sir, stop telling me stuff in such a vague manner and properly explain things!”

“But that wouldn’t be interesting at all. In order to obtain such fine dark emotions, it’s best to present a vague idea of the future.”

Sir Vanir seems to have taken great delight in my dark emotions.

Well, it’s my fault for getting tricked in the first place. Getting angry at Sir would just be being a sore loser.

“Well, I guess it’s time for me to turn in.”

“By the way, the girls who ended up falling for you still remember exactly

what happened when they were under the influence of that magic item. They must be overcome by embarrassment right now.”

“Seriously? Oh, give me a break...”

It feels like I’d be enduring far harsher treatment than I’ve ever experienced for the next few days.

Just imagining it gives me the chills.

I think I’ll just stay here and warm up for a while.

“Oh dammit, I got my expectations up because someone’s already here, but it’s just Dust.”

“Hey, Dust, Lynn and the others were blushing bright red in the hallway earlier. Do you know anything about that?”

Looks like Keith and Taylor have decided to join me.

Sir Vanir had vanished before I realized it.

“Who knows? Maybe there was a peeping tom or something?”

I flippantly replied, and they looked at me with a suspicious gaze.

Yeah, they totally suspect me.

“Don’t take it too far now. The residents here are a little, well, but the hot springs are quite exceptional.”

“Phew~ Yeah, it’s a city of weirdos, but the hot springs are amazing.”

After soaking into the pool, the two of them gazed up at the sky.

Seeing their naked bodies brought back memories from last night, and I vigorously shook my head to get that image out of it.

“Well, it’s a pity there aren’t any women here, but this isn’t too bad.”

“Yeah, it’s more relaxing to be amongst men. I don’t think I’ll care for women for a while.”

The other two gave me a strange look after I said that.

Did I say something odd?

"Hey, what's wrong? Did you catch some kind of weird disease? You should take an early night today."

"To think that you of all people would say that... Don't push yourself if you aren't feeling well, you hear?"

They seem genuinely worried about me.

Normally I'd be getting angry right now, but after getting into the hot springs, I don't really care about such trifles.

Plus, they are genuinely concerned for my wellbeing.

"Yeah, seems like what you really ought to have are male friends."

Chapter 4: Spreading the Devil's whispers together with that cultist

Part 1

I took a light nap after getting out from the hot springs, and by the time I woke up, it's gotten dark out.

I couldn't see Sir in the room anywhere, so I decided to head out in search of food.

There's a dining room on the first floor of the inn, but it's best to avoid seeing them for now, so I'll search for another restaurant.

As I was heading towards the main street, I saw a single woman walking towards me.

"Oh, she has a pretty good body. Maybe I should hit on... Nah, forget it. I've had enough of women for a while."

Normally I would call out to her, but after everything I've gone through, I don't feel like making a move right now.

Just as we were about to pass each other, the woman tripped on something and the contents of her shopping basket spilled out on the floor.

"Kyaa! What should I do!? The apples that I bought..."

Just as I nonchalantly helped the panicked woman pick up the fallen apples, she suddenly put down her shopping basket on the roadside and grasped my hand.

"Thank you very much! You really saved me! I wonder if there's anything I can do to thank you..."

She's keeping a really tight grip on my hand.

Wait, this tactic...

"There's a cafe operated by the Axis Cult just a short while ahead. Would you

mind having a chat with me there?”

“I knew it! This is another one of those recruitment scams!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, but I’m really good at fortune telling. I wouldn’t mind telling your fortune for free...”

As I tried to leave, the woman grabbed onto my clothes and refused to let go.

This girl’s surprisingly strong. I’m using quite a bit of strength to pry her away from me, but she isn’t budging an inch!

“Oh, I can see your fortune now! I foresee great troubles with women in your future! But don’t worry. Everything will work out fine if you join the Axis Cult!”

“I already have great troubles with women! Seriously, let go! If you keep at it, don’t blame me for fondling your boobs!”

“Say, what are you doing?”

The one who called out to me as I was struggling with the woman was the female thief, Chris.

“Oh, my, what a pitiful chest you have. But don’t worry, it’s fine. The Axis Cult preaches to love all regardless of the size of their chests, so why not join the Axis Cult?”

“You sure say some really rude things... Unfortunately, I’m already a member of the Eris Church.”

Chris bitterly smiled and showed her Eris Church pendant to the woman.

The bright smile on the woman’s face instantly vanished, to be replaced with an expression that made her seem like she just bit into something incredibly bitter.

“Pui.”

She spat on the ground, picked up her shopping basket, and quickly walked away.

Chris and I were too dumbfounded to do anything but stare at her back.

“...Pui.”

After taking a few steps, she briefly stopped, spat on the ground once more, and continued on her way.

"I've heard the rumours, but the headquarters of the Axis Cult really can't be taken lightly..."

"Yeah. I've really underestimated the Axis Cult... Still, you're finally here. The girls are back in the inn."

"Ah, I see. What were you doing out here alone?"

"It's a little awkward to meet them right now, so I thought I'd go elsewhere to get a meal."

"That means you're free, right? In that case, come with me. It's tough being an Eris Cultist in this city, so I'd like an escort. Come on, I'll treat you to a meal."

I had no reason to refuse. It's not like I have a lot of money in my wallet right now.

Plus, having an Eris Cultist around might prove to be a good shield against the residents of this town.

Part 2

As I was wandering around with Chris,

A woman whom I've never met before approached me, claiming to be a distant relative of mine before trying to recruit me.

A man tried to lead me to a building that's unmistakably a church with the line "It's free, so why not come take a look at my art exhibition?"

A genuine looking priest claiming to see the figure of a devil on my shoulder and offered to exorcise it.

In short-

"Hey, what the hell is wrong with this town!? Isn't it odd that a young girl like that would ask you to sign an Axis Cult recruitment form!?"

"Even I was taken aback by that. To think that a girl so young would be so devious. Perhaps it's best to just wipe this city from the map entirely?"

Chris, who was one step away from falling for that girl's act, said while holding her head in her hands.

I finally understand why Kazuma would give those vouchers to me. It's not something you want to experience again.

It's really bothersome to deal with the members of the Axis Cult, so after a while, whenever they would approach us, I would immediately point towards Chris and go,

"Sorry, she's an Eris Cultist."

Afterwards, they would spit on the ground, throw stones at her, or scream, "Eris pads her chest!" before immediately leaving, which made our journey far easier. Having her around is really convenient.

"This isn't senpai's fault, this isn't senpai's fault..."

Chris has started muttering some incomprehensible things as we moved along. Seems like she's suffered quite a bit of mental trauma from this.

Despite that, we still resolutely trudged on to our destination.

The reason we encountered more Axis Cultists as we proceeded is because our destination is close to the church that served as the Axis Cult's headquarters.

Walking right into the church would be akin to committing suicide, but fortunately, we had no business there.

Next to the church is a beautiful lake that is the source of much of the city's water. But that isn't our destination either.

Our destination is the large mountain behind the church where the source of the city's hot springs is located.

"Say, what business do you have with the mountain exactly?"

"Well, I accepted a little quest to investigate the abilities of the hot springs."

"Abilities? Oh, yeah, the cultists were saying something about it making your skin flawless, or it being extremely effective against devils and undead and other such crazy things."

"I came here to investigate that."

The stuff they say are mixed with lies, so it'd be useless to simply ask around about it.

If that's the contents of the quest, then there's no choice but to investigate it yourself. Well, as long as I can get a small portion of the reward and a meal out of it, I have no complaints.

Two knightly looking men are standing on the road leading to the source.

Well, it's the lifeblood for this city, so I suppose it's only natural for there to be guards.

"Excuse me, I'd like to pass through."

"Sorry, but I can't let you pass without permission. A lot of unpleasant events happened around here in the past, so things are a little stricter now."

The two knights averted their gaze and let out a huge sigh.

I'm kinda curious as to what happened.

"What happened?"

"A General of the Demon King's army tried to corrupt the source of the hot springs, but a band of adventurers who happened to be recuperating here took him out. However... apparently, the source got purified by the Archpriest, so now all it pumps out is plain hot water."

"Well, that certainly sounds horrible."

If the hot springs of a hot springs town turns into simple hot water, there'd be no point to its existence.

Wait, hold on a minute, weren't there a lot of tourists in the city? If anything, it seems to be thriving right now.

"But, for some reason, a rumour started spreading around that taking a bath in the waters will heal your wounds and repel undead and devils, so more people started visiting than ever before."

"They even say that the water from the springs will purify undead and devils when it's splashed on them."

What kind of hot springs is that?

Rather than hot springs, isn't it more similar to-

"It really is holy water."

Seems like Chris had the same line of thought. She had her arms crossed and appeared deep in thought about something.

I was wondering why someone would make a request to investigate the hot springs. So that's the reason.

"Say, is there really no way you can let us through? I just want to investigate the source for a while."

"Sorry, but those are the rules. Speaking of which, a masked man came around a short while ago asking about how the Deadly Slime of the Demon King's army is doing. Is he an acquaintance of yours?"

That'd be Sir Vanir, right? What was he doing all the way out here?

"That sounds like someone I know. Did he say anything else?"

"He was mumbling something that sounds like 'covering for that incompetent shopkeeper' and 'any evidence left behind.'"

Seems like Sir had another reason to visit. I'm a little curious about it, but my instincts tell me that it's best not to pry too deeply into Sir's matters.

Leaving that matter aside, the problem right now is what to do with this hard-headed knight. Simply talking to them probably wouldn't work.

Well, they're probably Axis Cultists too. I'll just weave a lie to make use of that.

"Hey, come on, aren't we both Axis Cultists? Can't you just look the other way just his once?"

Saying that, I pressed a couple of items into the knight's hand.

"Don't think you can just bribe your way through... Hey, this is just Axis recruitment forms and hot spring manju! Besides, we're both Eris worshippers!"

So bribing them with the free stuff I got from the inn wouldn't work, huh?

"There's no way we can entrust people from the Axis Cult to guard an important facility like this!"

Well, that certainly is true.

This job is a perfect match for that serious and stuck up Eris Church.

"So you're an Eris worshipper too. Sorry to request something impossible from you."

Chris bowed deeply to the knights, flashing her pendant in the process.

As she did so, the knight's expressions immediately softened. That's really effective.

"So you were an Eris worshipper after all. I knew it, you have the same air as we do."

"Ahh, it's almost like my prayers have been answered."

"Ahaha, is that so?"

Chris let out a shy laughter as the trio commenced smalltalk.

Being uninvolved with the conversation, I lazily looked upon the night city to pass time. After a short while, Chris seemed to have wrapped up the conversation on their end, and heartily waved at the knights as she made her way back to me.

"To think that even in this town, there are proper Eris Cultists hard at work. It makes me kind of happy."

"Well, if the Axis Cult was in charge of everything, this entire city would fall to ruin. Anyway, what about the investigation?"

"Ah, that's fine. I just got the details out of them, so I'm satisfied."

"So that's quest complete, right? Then hurry up and treat me to a meal!"

"Ah, sure, sure, I promised, after all. Let's head to a restaurant, then."

I returned back to town along with a strangely happy Chris and entered a restaurant with a terrace.

The menu is overflowing and the price is reasonable too. This seems like a

pretty good place.

The staff brought the food we ordered to the table, and we heartily devoured anything that looked decent.

“Oh, yes, esteemed Eris Cultist, this is a special service from our store.”

“Oh, so there’s a special service for Eris Cultists. I should’ve joined when I had the chance.”

Chris still had her pendant out from when she was talking with the knights, so it seemed like the waitress noticed that.

This is probably one of the few stores in town run by Eris worshippers.

With a smile, the waitress left a pair of soft, bowl shaped items on the table.

“Thank...”

Chris’s expression immediately turned frigid upon seeing those items, and her clenched fist trembled.

“Aren’t those things pads?”

Knowing that she’s an Eris Cultist, and further noticing her small chests, they choose to present her with this to tease her.

You really can’t underestimate the Axis Cult.

After that incident, I decided that it’d be best to take the depressed Chris back to the inn.

On the way back, I overheard a bunch of drunk Axis Cultists talking loudly over something or the other.

“Aqua-sama is the best, but, to tell the truth, Eris-sama has a certain charm about her.”

“You heretic, what are you saying!? But, I’ll admit that the way she smiles and her chest in that portrait of her is quite charming. I want to bury my face in that bountiful chest!”

“You get it, don’t you? Yeah, it’s a different sort of charm than Aqua-sama’s. How should I put this, she gives off an open minded, pure, heroine-like feeling. I want to become friends with Aqua-sama, but I want to make Eris-sama my wife,

sorta?"

"Yeah, that's it! That's exactly it!"

Those drunkards started getting excited.

Is it really fine to want to be friends with your goddess?

Though, I guess the carefree Axis Cult will probably be fine with that.

"Why are you blushing?"

"Eh? No, it's nothing!"

Chris frantically waved her arms around to cover up her embarrassment.

It seems like she's happy that her goddess has received praise.

"I wonder what Goddess Aqua is like. After running into so many of her followers, I'm really curious as to what kind of person she herself is. I really want to meet her at least once."

"You've already met her countless times..."

"Did you say something?"

"Not particularly."

The way she responded piqued my curiosity a little, but I'm not really in the mood to interrogate someone right now, so I won't pry.

On the other side of the street, the drunks continued their conversation.

"Still, those breasts are stuffed, aren't they?"

"So I've heard. I don't mind petite chests myself, but fake breasts are a little pathetic, aren't they?"

Chris's shoulders suddenly stiffened..

Well, she's an Eris worshipper. It's only natural for her to react this way if her goddess is being made fun of.

Still, Goddess Eris definitely wore pads.

"I'm heading to bed..."

"Oh, right. Um, well, I think I prefer Goddess Eris to Goddess Aqua."

"Ha ha... Thank you."

I tried to offer some encouragement to Chris as we arrived at the inn.

Eris worshippers really shouldn't visit this town.

I could sense a vague feeling of discomfort from the Eris worshipping knights too.

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter to me."

My belly is quite full thanks to Chris's treat, so I guess I'll go to sleep.

After jumping into bed, I forgot all about the troubles of the Axis Cult and Chris's depressed mood and fell into a deep sleep.

... Just then, I was awoken by a sharp rapping on the door.

It still seems to be quite late at night, judging from what I could see outside my window. Sir Vanir hasn't returned yet, so don't tell me he forgot the keys or something?

"Is that Sir? I'll unlock the door right now."

After unlocking the door and opening it, I came face to face with Yunyun.

She was staring at the floor and fiddling with her fingers.

... She must have come here to lecture me after that incident in the hot springs.

"Umm, err..."

"I'm sorry about what happened in the mixed baths, but you were the ones who made the first move."

Well, that was because of the magic item, but she shouldn't know anything about that.

"I-I understand that. But it's strange. I became really assertive for some reason and saw Dust-san in a much better light. It's like some kind of strange illusion or something..."

"W-Well, did you drink too much sake or something?"

"I don't recall drinking anything, but perhaps I did by mistake."

She tilted her head. It feels like I'd be able to fool her like this.

"The staff probably gave you sake instead of juice and you didn't notice because you were too excited. That's probably it."

"That's... probably it. Umm, please forget about the mixed bath incident. I didn't mean anything I said, so please forget about it!"

Yunyun's face was so red that it wouldn't be surprising if steam were to start pouring out of her cheeks.

She's probably worried about the fact that I saw her half naked.

"Oh, I already forgot about that. Don't worry too much about it. Still, I kind of liked that bold side of you."

"You didn't forget at all!"

She screamed as she started beating against my chest.

Well, it took a bit of effort, but eventually I managed to calm her down and sent her back to her room.

She might look like that, but she's still a kid, so I shouldn't tease her too about such matters.

Thinking to catch a good long nap this time, I crawled into my bed and pulled the blanket up to my shoulders.

Part 3

"Just what's wrong with the citizens of this city!?"

I woke up to the sound of Sir Vanir's angry declaration.

"What's got you so riled up this early in the morning, Sir?"

"It's already noon, lustful delinquent. The Axis Cult is truly beyond help. Despite telling their priests about the habits of that layabout goddess, instead of losing faith, they simply went 'that sounds like Aqua-sama alright!' One must conclude that they are all shot in the head!"

"There are a lot of points I want to pick apart, but have you met that goddess

before, Sir?"

"We meet extremely frequently! She often visits the store to kill time without any invitation on my part. But enough about that. Moi cannot rest easy without dealing a blow to the irritating residents of this city!"

It's really rare for Sir Vanir to get this worked up.

... No, that's not strictly true. He gets worked up in much the same way whenever the beautiful shopkeeper purchases some useless goods and rakes in the bills.

And is Sir Vanir mixing up the self-proclaimed goddess and the actual goddess of the Axis Cult?

The one who comes to the store to play around is Kazuma's party priest.

"The length of this stay is until the day after tomorrow, yes? Perhaps I should secure her assistance and turn this city upside down! Moi shall turn this city into a wonderful place overflowing with negative emotions! Fuhahahaha!"

Sir seemed to be getting really excited as he muttered to himself, so I quietly left the room and descended to the first floor.

Apart from Chris, all the other members of my party were gathered downstairs by the table, and every single one of them seemed exhausted.

"Dammit, here I thought I finally got popular..."

"I'm not taking another step out of this inn. This is a city of demons..."

Keith's and Taylor's pockets were stuffed to the brim with Axis Cult recruitment forms. I really don't need to ask what happened.

"They've gotten way worse than the last time I came here... though the methods they're using seem familiar somehow..."

The comparatively energetic Yunyun appears to be deep in thought about something.

She's the only one of us who's been in this city before, so she should've built up some immunity, but somehow, she seems to be the one most vulnerable to the Axis Cult's antics out of all of us.

"I want to go back to the store... The Axis Cult is scary... I'll be heading back to the room..."

A pale faced Loli Succubus hugged herself tightly as she ascended the stairs.

Seems like she's suffered the worst damage out of all of us. Come to think of it, I've heard that ever since the hot springs became holy water, even the steam would cause damage to low ranking devils like succubi upon contact.

A high ranking devil like Sir Vanir seems to be unaffected, though.

"Dust, do you think we should cut our stay short and head back earlier?"

Lynn seems quite exhausted too.

In a certain sense, it's great that everyone's too exhausted to mention the mixed bathing incident, but judging from how things are going, it might really be best to cut this trip short.

I'm a little concerned for how Loli Succubus is holding up too.

"Yeah, alright. This isn't really a place that you should linger-"

"Hold on a minute!"

The person who interrupted me was a fairly cheerful Chris, her depressed demeanour from the previous day nowhere to be found.

After rushing over to our table, she slammed her hand against it with a loud bang.

"There's something I'd like your help on! Don't you think that it'd be bad if this city remains as it is!?"

"Eh? Chris-san?"

Yunyun appeared surprised by Chris's appearance. It seems like they knew each other from before.

The others were also taken aback by Chris's enthusiasm, their gazes squarely focused on her.

I have a bad feeling about this, but I can at least hear her out.

"I just can't take when Eris Cultists are being looked down upon like this. I

would like everyone to help me think of a method to raise the standing of the Eris Church in this city. It's definitely not because I'm angry over the pads!"

She probably thought of this after talking with those two knights yesterday. She wants to do something for those devoted worshippers of Eris. Well, it's not like I can't understand where she's coming from, but I really don't want to get involved with the Axis Cult.

"Say, Dust, she's the thief that occasionally hangs out around Kazuma, right?"

As Chris continued with her passionate speech, the rest of us huddled into a small corner and started discussing in hushed tones.

"Yeah, her name is Chris. Apparently, she's an Eris worshipper. After suffering at the hands of the city's residents yesterday, she ended up like this."

"I do sympathise with her, but I think it'd be best not to get involved with the Axis Cult... raise your hands if you agree with me."

At Lynn's words, everyone except Chris, who was off in her own world, raised their hands.

"That said, they caused a lot of trouble for us, so I do kind of want to get back at them. At least a little."

"I get where you're coming from."

Keith mused, and Taylor agreed with him.

"Chris-san is part of our group, so I really want to help her, but..."

Yunyun doesn't seem to hold much enthusiasm for the prospect, huh.

Lynn seems to be of a similar mind.

There's no particular benefit for us if we were to help out. In this situation, we should just nod along to whatever she says.

I'm sure she'll calm down after voicing her complaints.

"Recently, there've been a lot of books with erotic pictures circulating around in Axel, and from what I've heard, that is also the work of the Axis Cult..."

Wait, she's talking about the books I found in the dungeon, right?

My friends are of course aware of that, and their gaze naturally fell upon me.

"When the Eris Church confronted the Axis Cult about this, they replied with, 'This isn't our work, but these books are most wonderful indeed! Actually, why don't you tell us exactly what about this book is obscene?' and other such sexually harassing words. The original plan was to cooperate with the police to search their church under the charge of distributing obscene materials, but..."

If they seriously investigate that, it'd be very quickly made clear that I was the one who sold those books.

Isn't this really bad?

"Ah, right, I'll return the money we got from selling that treasure to you, Dust."

"I'll return it too."

"In that case, I shall return it too."

"Hey, don't try to distance yourselves from this, you assholes!"

"Eh? Eh? What are you talking about?"

Yunyun appeared completely lost, but that's only to be expected, so I ignored her.

Still, at this rate, I'm going to end up in trouble with the cops again.

I don't really mind that, but it'd really hurt if the proceeds I got from selling that treasure were to be confiscated too.

I'll have to cooperate with Chris here and have the Eris Church owe me a favour.

"Right, I got it, we'll lend you a hand. Let's have the Axis Cult in this town cry uncle. You guys want to see that too, right?"

My friends seem to understand what I'm going for, and silently nodded in agreement.

Yunyun seemed completely confused by this turn of events, but, lacking the courage to refuse, she simply went with the flow and nodded.

This trip was originally meant to be a relaxing trip to help Keith and Taylor

recover, but it ended up piling more stress upon all of us.

After causing so much trouble for us, it wouldn't be right to just leave without repaying it in kind.

"Really!? Thank you!"

Looking at Chris's sparkling eyes and wide smile, an interesting idea floated to my mind.

I thought she seemed familiar when I first saw her, and now I finally understand what that's all about.

"I thought of a really great idea. If things go well, the Eris church might even get more worshippers out of it!"

Part 4

I didn't have enough materials on hand to put my idea into practice, so right now I'm on a trip out to procure the items.

I'm pretty sure it was in this direction...

"By the way, why are you here?"

"I'd be worried if it was just you alone..."

For some reason, Yunyun was next to me.

She was fidgeting about while staring resolutely at the ground.

Could it be that she was still concerned about what happened in the mixed baths?

"You saw my naked body too, so aren't we even? I don't mind stripping right here if you're unsatisfied."

"Please, enough about that! Don't make me remember it!"

Hmm, guess that wasn't it.

I was pretty sure she was still hung up about that incident.

In that case, why is she following me?

"I'm just going out to borrow the necessary materials."

"Is that so. Umm, err, the weather is great, isn't it?"

Hearing that, I gazed towards the sky. True enough, it's a cloudless day. That said, I have no idea where this is heading.

Looking back down again, I noticed that Yunyun has shifted even closer to me.

On closer inspection, she really is slowly closing the distance between us.

"Say, what exactly are you doing?"

"Fwueh! I-I'm not doing anything!"

Yunyun's hands started waving around at a truly tremendous speed as she said that.

She seemed to be embarrassed, but in that case, why did she approach me in the first place?

Could she still be under the effects of that magic item... no, that's unlikely. It's a type of spell, so with Yunyun's strong magic powers, she should be more resistant to its effects and thus have a much faster recovery rate.

That means she must be doing this of her own free will.

Yeah, I don't get it at all.

"Anyway, where are we headed?"

"Ah, I need to visit the theatre for a bit."

"A theatre? It'd be nice if there are any interesting plays on the schedule. I wonder if there are any romance-"

"Er, I'm not going there to catch a show, you know?"

I'm getting a bad feeling from her strange responses, but I guess it doesn't really matter right now. As long as it doesn't get in the way, I'll leave it be.

"Ah, there's a really trendy looking cafe over here!"

"You want me to treat you? What, do you really think that there's that much money in my wallet?"

"Dust-san really is a good-for-nothing..."

Even if you say that, it's not like money will just materialize in my pocket.

Ignoring the cafe, we continued on before coming to a stop at a roadside store.

"Dust-san! Dust-san! They have some really cute stuffed animals on sale!"

I frowned upon looking at the price tag of the stuffed animal that Yunyun was holding.

It's several times the value I usually pay for my drinks.

"Geh, is this really worth that much? Hey, can't you cut the price a little? Say, by about fifty percent?"

"Sorry, but this is the lowest I can go."

"N-No, wait, this is embarrassing, please stop! I'm so, so sorry!"

Just as I started haggling with the storekeeper, Yunyun forced her way between us and dragged me off.

"Mou! You shouldn't cause trouble for the shopkeeper like that!"

"I only haggled with him for a lower price because you seemed really taken with that."

We ran into several other shops selling souvenirs and accessories and the like, but I ignored Yunyun who was making a fuss, and eventually arrived at the theatre.

"I didn't manage to do anything that felt like..."

"What are you talking about?"

It's really creepy to mutter while standing next to someone.

She seems to be really worked up today for some reason.

"Nevermind. It doesn't matter anymore..."

Yunyun heaved a sigh and started heading back by herself.

That was really odd of her. Oh well, I should hurry up and do what I came here for.

Part 5

“It’s a little late, but I wonder if we’ll suffer divine punishment for doing this...”

“You were right on board with this plan until just now. Don’t worry, it’ll be fine. Eris-sama looks like a kind woman, so I’m sure she’ll laugh it off.”

Lynn was looking at Chris with a worried expression.

Chris herself had a stiff smile on her face as she sat upon the chair.

Between the make-up and the regal clothing she has, Chris really is the splitting image of Goddess Eris. More so than even I expected.

I was only with her for a short while, so I can’t remember all of the specifics, but this certainly felt right.

I always thought she looked familiar, but once you hide that scar with makeup and put her in the right clothing, she really does look like the genuine article.

“It feels like I just went through something similar recently...”

She had a troubled expression as she scratched her cheek, but she seemed to swallow her doubts after being told it’s for the sake of the Eris Church.

“Dust, where did you get these clothes from? They look just like the clothes Goddess Eris wears in her portraits, but I’m surprised you managed to find such clothes here.”

“There’s a popular play on show at the theatre where Goddess Eris keeps messing up and has to be bailed out by her senpai Goddess Aqua. I borrowed the clothes from that set.”

“Eh, isn’t that reversed...”

Chris had an expression like she just bit into something sour.

It seems that wasn’t something a worshipper of Eris could accept.

“It’s not like we are appropriating her likeness to cheat people or anything. People dressed up as her during the Eris Thanksgiving festival, so this is just more of the same. If you dress up as Eris and walk around performing good

deeds, I'm sure the reputation of the Eris Church would go up a bit."

"Still, isn't it suicide to walk around in the Axis Cult's home base in this outfit?"

No one responded to Keith's comment.

This is a city that gives horrible treatment just for being an Eris worshipper. It's hard to imagine them taking this lying down.

"Hey, say something! Am I being sent off to die!?"

"They... probably won't kill you... probably"

"Look at me while you're saying that! Why is everyone looking away!?"

I thought of this plan after remembering the rumours I've heard about the recent Eris Thanksgiving festival.

I wasn't there myself, but apparently, the actual goddess appeared in the flesh at the Miss Eris beauty contest.

Rumours of that incident has spread all over the world, so it would seem more plausible if she were to appear in this town too. That was the idea, at least.

"Even if they are Axis Cultists, I'm sure they wouldn't do anything reckless to a possible goddess."

"Yeah, even if it's the Axis Cult."

"Yeah..."

My companions nodded along, almost as if they are trying to convince themselves.

"But, if they realized that it was a fake..."

In response to Yunyun's ponderings, everyone, once again, fell silent.

It'd be risky even if the actual goddess Eris were to set foot in this city, so if they found out she was a fake, then, well...

"You'll probably be ganged up on and chased out of the city."

"It'd be fine if it stopped there, but there are residents of this city who treat

picking on Eris worshipers as their life's purpose, so..."

Yunyun has the most experience with this town, so her words bear a certain amount of weight.

I've only been here for two days, but from what I've experienced, what she says isn't all that far-fetched.

"Hey, this is all just putting me more on edge! Maybe we should call it off? I do want to raise the standing of the Eris Church, but this method is definitely a mistake!"

"Should we think about another method?"

Everyone seemed relieved when I suggested that.

Well, that's good and all, but I can't really think of any other method...

"A devil has appeared! It seems like he's insulting Aqua-sama by the fountain square!"

"A devil?"

Just when I thought it was getting noisy at the inn downstairs, Chris, still dressed up as Eris, ran out the door.

"W-Wait, hold on, don't go outside wearing that!"

"Chris-san!? No, don't, it's dangerous!"

The rest of us chased after her in a panic.

I've heard that the Eris Church hates devils as much as the Axis Cult, but I didn't expect her to forget about us and rush out while wearing that outfit.

There are a few people who definitely wanted to cause trouble for Chris after seeing her in that outfit, but with her bloodlusted glare, she completely failed to notice them.

In front of the fountain was a wooden platform that wasn't there yesterday, and standing on top of it were Sir Vanir and Loli Succubus.

Sir Vanir was standing proudly as he stared down at the crowd of citizens that had formed around the stage. In contrast, Loli Succubus was trembling as she clung onto Sir Vanir's sleeve.

What the hell are those two doing? It'll become a really big deal if people found out that there are devils in this city.

"That looks like the mask that assistant-kun has? It feels weird somehow, but I can't quite tell in this form."

Chris's mask of rage was replaced by an expression of bewilderment upon laying eyes on Sir.

I couldn't follow what she said at all, but it seems like she's calmed down a little.

Sir Vanir seems calm, but the crowd surrounding him seemed just about ready to leap onto the stage.

"A blasphemous priest claiming to be Aqua-sama appeared here not long ago, and now a devilish man is here spreading insults about Aqua-sama!"

"Fuhahaha! Oh, foolish people who believe in that foolish goddess, you've done well to answer my calls. Ah, I used foolish twice there, how shameful of me."

Sir Vanir let out another hearty laugh as he placed a hand on his forehead.

Doesn't look like he has lost his touch at riling people up.

"Moi is merely spreading the truth to the foolish and incompetent masses. Instead of being angry, should you not be thankful instead?"

"What the hell are you saying!? That mask does seem a little cool, but don't think you'll get away after making fun of Aqua-sama!"

"How dare you make fun of Aqua-sama, you damned devil!"

"Does thou really worship that embodiment of sloth and incompetence as a goddess!? She does nothing but cause trouble for the Eris Church, get drunk and cause trouble for the guild staff in her revelry, and is only acknowledged for her party tricks!"

Sir Vanir seems to be working himself up into quite a fervor, but isn't that referring to the non-goddess Aqua?

Just when I thought that the crowd was strangely serious for once, they

nodded along to his words and let out a cry.

“Isn’t that the best!?”

What the hell are they saying...

“It’s just as written in the teachings of the Axis Cult. ‘Regardless of whether you restrain yourself and work seriously or live without worries, one never knows what will come tomorrow. Thus, instead of worrying about the uncertain future, one should focus on living a comfortable present!’”

“Yes, that’s exactly it. Do you not know about the doctrines of the Axis Cult? ‘If you are worried about something, simply enjoy yourself in the present. Don’t restrain yourself, simply follow your true desires!’ I review this every night!”

“Seriously, this is why you’re a greenhorn. ‘There is no need to restrain yourself, drink when you feel like drinking, and eat when you feel like eating, for there’s no guarantee that you’ll be able to drink and eat tomorrow.’ Make sure you write this down!”

The people who seemed to be the priests of the Axis Cult shot back to Sir Vanir.

Still, what’s with these doctrines? They really strike a cord in my heart.

Maybe the Axis Cult isn’t too bad.

“That’s just like how you live your life, isn’t it? That’s why people mistake you for a member of the Axis Cult.”

“... Am I really that bad?”

Everyone silently nodded.

I thought back to the behavior of the Axis Cultists I encountered in this city. Am I really on the same level?

As I was thinking it through, Sir Vanir and the crowd continued their bickering.

“Masked man, you speak like you’ve met with Aqua-sama personally, but there’ve been no rumours that Aqua-sama has descended to this world. Though, there was an imposter who took her name not too long ago.”

The crowd nodded in agreement with that woman’s screams.

... Hmm? Why are the priests all averting their gazes?

"Hmph, you merely do not know of it. The Goddess Aqua is... No, revealing that carries the risk of making them more conceited. Very well, foolish cult that idolizes and imitates a fool, listen well. Have you heard of the rumour of the Goddess Eris having descended in the town of Axel?"

The crowd became agitated upon hearing Sir's words.

"Yeah, I've heard of it. She appeared at the thanksgiving festival or something like that."

"The Eris Church was boasting so much about it."

Seems like that story has spread to this town as well.

The plan that I thought of might've actually worked out.

"What a load of crock... Thought if it were Aqua-sama, it might be believable."

"It's Aqua-sama, after all."

"Aqua-sama seems like the sort of person who would do this."

And they believed it so easily!

Though, if we're talking about the goddess who'd spread such doctrines, that does sound quite plausible.

"Before coming here, moi truly believed that the Axis Cult is a collection of irrevocable fools, but moi has reflected on that. From the outside, they seem like a collection of optimistic slackers, but what is hiding beneath is a burning spirit that seeks true freedom. After witnessing that, moi truly is touched!"

Loli Succubus's jaw dropped in shock upon hearing Sir Vanir's declaration.

I never expected that a devil like him would sympathize with the Axis Cult. Did breathing in the water vapours from the hot springs do something to him?

... No, he's planning something. I haven't known him for that long, but I at least know that much.

"Ah, so you finally understand the beauty of the Axis Cult. That makes us comrades. Let those comments be water under the bridge."

A member of the crowd said that, and smiles started appearing amongst them.

It's almost as if the murderous atmosphere from before was but a mere illusion.

The Axis Culistst are surprisingly naive, aren't they?

"Moi originally planned on striking it rich by selling these photobooks of the descended goddess Aqua that moi took in secret at a high price, but now that you gentlemen are my comrades, perhaps I should sell them for heavy discount!"

Saying that, he opened the lid of the wooden box that lay on the platform together with Loli Succubus.

Ah, so that's it. After starting a frenzy with that declaration, he intends to sell them for an exorbitant price while claiming it to be a discount. Sir is a quite a schemer.

"Photos of Aqua-sama!? I'll buy them! I'll definitely buy them!"

Loli Succubus was thrown into a panic by the sudden murderous air that descended upon the gathered worshippers.

Nevermind selling them, at this rate, it's more likely for a riot to happen.

I unhesitantly dived onto the platform and put myself between Loli Succubus and the crowd.

"Hey, come on, calm down! You won't be able to buy them unless you line up properly. Hey, Sir, you're understaffed, right? I'll lend you a hand."

"How enterprising of you. Very well, moi shall offer you ten percent of the profits."

"It's a deal!"

Seems like we understood each other with just a glance.

Both of us could barely hide our smiles.

"You guys help out too! You're a friend of Sir, right, Yunyun?"

"Eh, ah, yes!"

We arranged the photobooks on the long table and started selling them to the rush of Axis Cultists.

Chris, still dressed as Goddess Eris, seemed to finally realize how out of place she is and made to return to the inn.

The photobooks were handed over one after another.

"Dammit, I can't look inside like this! Does anyone have a pair of scissors or a needle or something?"

The photobooks were tightly bound with ribbons to prevent them from browsing through their contents, so the crowd were frantically searching for a way cut through them.

An adventurer looking fellow used his shortsword to cut through the ribbon, and immediately started flipping through the pages.

"What the hell is this!?"

Not long afterwards, he let out a scream that echoed throughout the plaza.

Attracted by the commotion, the crowd gathered around him and stiffened upon witnessing it's contents.

"This page too! And this one! What is the meaning of this!?"

The photobook was flung to the ground in front of me, its pages flapping in the breeze.

What's inside wasn't photos of Goddess Aqua, but-

"Too bad, it's a photo collection of moi! Fuhahahaha!"

Photos of Sir, half naked in various poses.

Murderous gazes shot at us from every direction, but Sir seemed to pay it no heed and let out a grandiose laugh.

"What wonderful dark emotions! The dark emotions of those who worship her are quite something indeed! Fuhahaha! Yes, it's most wonderful!"

"Vanir-sama! Vanir-sama! Now's not the time to laugh!"

A trembling Loli Succubus screamed at Sir Vanir through her tear streaked

face.

Well, that's only natural. She's surrounded by a crowd of murderous Axis Cultists, after all.

"Capture them! Toss them into the hot springs for three days and three nights while they can hear our scriptures!"

"Don't let them get away!"

Sir Vanir tossed Loli Succubus away from him moments before disappearing beneath a pile of bodies as the murderous crowd swarmed over him.

"Vanir-sama!"

"I got him! Hmm? Doesn't he feel strangely light?"

"Gorgeous molting."

I could barely make out the voices of Sir Vanir and Loli Succubus amidst the noise of the crowd.

From the sounds of it, Sir Vanir managed to avoid capture, but I couldn't make out any details through the mass of bodies.

"S-Say, aren't we in danger too?"

A frightened Lynn pulled on my sleeve.

"Now that you mention it..."

It's only natural to assume that we are in cahoots with Sir Vanir after helping him sell those books. That means, their next target would be...

The members of the crowd who became frustrated with Vanir's repeated escapes turned their gaze over to us.

That is not a pleasant gaze. I don't even want to think about what would happen if they caught us.

"Capture his companions too!"

"Retreat! Run for it! Your life will be over if you get caught!"

"Eeeh!"

I quickly broke for it, followed by my companions. Behind them, the Axis

Cultists surged after us like a massive human wave.

Things will really be over if they catch you. Seeing that sight made me certain of it.

As we were desperately running down the street, we caught up to Chris who was slowly plodding along ahead of us.

“Goddess Eris is over there!”

I decided to make use of that.

“So the Dark Goddess Eris was behind all of this! I’ll never forgive you!”

Looks like the hostility that was directed at us was successfully transferred to “Goddess Eris”, aka Chris.

Chris took one look at the oncoming rush of people and immediately took off running.

“What!? What is going on!?”

“You don’t want to know what they’ll do to you! Just run for it!”

“I don’t get it at all! Why are the Axis Cultists chasing me!?”

Chris asked me a few questions as she ran alongside me, but I couldn’t spare the energy to respond.

The stamina and speed of the cultists aren’t normal. Even the children and old men are keeping pace. It must be because of the support magic that the Priests provided.

“At this rate, it’s only a matter of time before we get caught! Let’s split up!”

“Right! Let’s do it!”

After hearing everyone’s voices of agreement, we split up along a three way intersection, and I followed the path that Yunyun was taking.

I’ve heard that Yunyun was familiar with the top priest of the Axis Cult.

If I’m together with her, I might be able to get off lightly if we get caught... probably.

Plus, I might be able to use the fact that she’s a Crimson Demon to scare them

and get away that way.

Perhaps because of her loner talent, I was the only one who choose the same path that Yunyun did.

I'm a little concerned about the guys who went down the other path, but Chris is a devout Eris worshipper. If they seek help from those knights, they'll probably offer them shelter too.

... Still, Keith and Taylor are still recovering, aren't they? Well, I should at least try and lure most of them into following me.

"I'll make good use of the money you gave us, so rest easy!"

"You bastard! I'll fucking kill you!"

Judging from the response, it seems like I was able to draw a large portion of them my way.

"If worse comes to worse, I'll be relying on you, Yunyun!"

"S-Sure... is what you expected me to say, but too bad! It is moi!"

Sir Vanir shed the appearance of Yunyun as he was running.

My legs almost stopped in response, but I somehow managed to keep going.

Hearing the sound of footsteps intensifying behind me, I turned around.

After sighting the presence of Sir, it seems like every single one of the Axis Cultists turned around to chase after me.

"The Blasphemer is over there! Give me back my money, you bastard!"

The angry screams of the crowd mixed with the sound of their rapid footsteps.

... If I'm caught now, I might actually die.

"You're kidding me, right! What are you doing, Sir!?"

"Moi merely wishes to experience as much delicious dark emotions as possible. By doing this, I'll be able to experience both the dark emotions of the fastest runner and the feelings of those foolish worshipers for as long as possible! It's a most devilish idea indeed!"

If I wasn't involved, I might have been impressed by this.

Still, now isn't the time to complain.

If I lose my breath here and get caught by them, I get the feeling that my life might really end.

"It's like all I've been doing recently is running!"

Part 6

"Haa....A person can really do some really amazing deeds when their life is on the line."

After having lost them by running across half the town, I stuck my head out from the alley I was hiding in to check if any of them are close by.

Looks like I managed to shake them off completely.

"Right, now I just need to meet up with Keith and the others and bid farewell to this city."

"You're going back?"

"HYAAAaaa... oh, it's Yunyun. Don't scare me like that, I think I just lost ten years of my life."

Feeling something tap on my back, I whirled around to see Yunyun's face staring back at me.

"It's the real deal this time, right... How did it go on your end? Did you guys make it out okay?"

"Yeah, we got away really easily after you lured all of them away. Um, thank you very much."

I was the one who got her into this mess, so it feels kind of awkward to have her thanking me like that.

In order to wipe out this feeling of guilt a little...

"Hey Yunyun, here."

I handed over the stuffed toy that I bought on the way back from the theatre.

With its mouth hanging agape like a fool, the expression on the plushie mirrored the one Yunyun gave me after receiving it.

“Eh? This is...”

“That Explosion girl’s been getting on well with Kazuma lately, and you were acting strangely because you were competing with her, right? You probably wanted to boast about having gone on a date to make her jealous, but the only male friend you know is me, am I right?”

“Uck, y-you knew?”

It’s pretty obvious, after all.

“You might be able to stand up to her better if you have a present you got from a man.”

I remembered the conversation that Yunyun had with the Explosion girl in the guild before we left, so I bought the plushie with the last of my money.

Because of monetary issues, it’s a little smaller than the one she wanted, but it looks similar at least.

“I’ll forget about the mixed bathing incident, then! You have a pretty good side after all!”

“Yeah, yeah, thanks.”

Looking at Yunyun happily hug the plushie, I patted my empty wallet.

Yeah, guess it was worth it after all.



Chapter 5: A Single Stab for that Destructive Weapon

Part 1

"I'm never going back to that city!"

I declared in the carriage, but, other than briefly turning in my direction, my tired-looking companions paid me no heed.

After spending an entire night running across the city, we finally managed to shake off the cultists, meet up, and left the city on a carriage.

After getting out of that costume, Chris said that she had business elsewhere, so she took a separate route back.

The people in my carriage were my regular party: Keith, Taylor, and Lynn. Everyone else was in the other carriage.

... It seemed like they were dead tired due to exhaustion, just like us.

"Seriously, it was horrible back there. It really was too good to be true."

"It's not my fault, Kazuma was the one who gave those vouchers to me! Don't forget that!"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. We weren't blaming you or anything, were we?"

I was a little irritated at Lynn's condescending manner, but I didn't really have the energy to argue with her right now, so I simply slumped into my chair.

It could be said that Sir Vanir was to blame for this turn of events, but he gave us quite a considerable sum from the money he conned from the Axis Cultists, so we decided not to push that issue.

Yunyun was the only one to refuse the money, and in fact gave Sir a serious lecture. Despite how shy she usually is, she has times where she stamps her foot down too.

This incident felt really perilous at times, but there is a silver lining that I need

to thank Sir Vanir for. After all, this pushed the incident at the mixed baths out of everyone's minds.

I expected them to pursue me about that and other such unpleasantness, but no one brought up the subject at all. On this point at least, I'm really indebted to him.

"Haa... I really want to get back to Axel and drink some sake..."

"I want to take a long nap in a bed."

Personally, I just want to take it easy.

As I was thinking about that, nodding off to the soft rumbling of the carriage, the voice of the driver reached my ears.

"Customer, we're at the Axel gates."

Opening the window to take a peek, I could see the walls of Axel stretching out before me.

As expected of a wall recently rebuilt after a certain someone washed them away, the damaged portions now looked brand new.

"That wall was made with the money that Kazuma provided, right?"

"It sounds impressive when you put it that way. Well, a member of his party was the one who damaged them in the first place."

Lynn, leaning out the same window as me, said with an impressed note in her voice.

The fact that she didn't say anything even though our bodies were touching meant that she doesn't care about that incident in the mixed baths anymore, right?

"Hmm? Say, aren't the gatekeepers acting kind of strange?"

Following Lynn's gaze, I noticed that the gatekeepers, who would usually closely check anyone passing through the gates, were simply letting people pass without talking to them.

"They look really listless. Usually they'd stop and accuse me of bringing in suspicious items or the like on sight."

"That's because you keep causing them trouble. Did you forget about the time you caught a one strike rabbit and tried to bring it into the city to be sold as an exotic pet? You really raised a huge fuss back then."

"Those guys were really hard-headed. The rabbit would've sold for a lot of money too."

"If they had let you bring it through, you'd have surely have been arrested after it ran amuck and harmed someone... nevermind that, there's definitely something odd with the gatekeepers."

They were letting everyone through without bothering to check them, so there wasn't much of a line. Very soon, it was our turn.

Normally, they'd take a quick look inside the carriage to check for any wanted criminals or dangerous items, but this time...

"Go on ahead. Sigh..."

They let us through without even looking at us.

It's certainly convenient from my perspective, but even public enemy number one could get through the gates like this.

"Hey, shouldn't you be taking your jobs a little more seriously?"

I, uncharastically for once, let my true thoughts slip out to the gatekeeper, and he glanced at me before letting out another sigh.

"Who cares about that... I want to go back and sleep..."

"I can understand that sentiment, but come on, do your job properly."

"I want to hire a maid that will do anything I say and sleep the day away..."

I thought he might be the only one that's odd, but it seems like everyone at the gatehouse shared his lack of enthusiasm.

There's a guard taking a snooze while leaning against the gate, and there's even one who's lying on the grass outside, a dazed expression on his face as he gazed up at the sky.

"T-That's a strange sight. Even the gatekeeper who was concerned for my well being when I brought Megumin back is..."

"It kind of resembles what happens when a person's vitality has been drained, but it's kind of off..."

"Truly, something strange is happening here."

It seems like Sir Vanir and the others also found the situation odd and got out of their carriage to catch up with us.

After thanking the carriage driver, we got off from the carriage ourselves and entered the town of Axel.

I had a bad feeling about this, and the conditions inside the town weren't much better.

There were people sitting around on the corners of the street, and some of them were even laying down and sleeping.

Most of the stores were closed, and even the ones that were open had no activity at all, with the storekeepers sitting outside, listlessly basking in the sun.

"It's like I stepped into some sort of strange dream. Could this be a serious crisis..."

"U-Um, I'm worried about Megumin, so I'll go check on the mansion! Please excuse me!"

Yunyun dashed away in the direction of Kazuma's house.

"I'm worried about the store too, so I'll be going on ahead!"

After bowing several times to Sir Vanir, Loli Succubus also left the party.

"Moi am worried about my store too. We won't be able to sell anything like this."

And Sir Vanir casually walked away in the direction of his store.

The rest of us huddled together to discuss our next course of action.

"Shall we go to the adventurer's guild to check on things?"

"Yeah, that makes sense. If it really is an incident, they might be planning some sort of countermeasure too."

As we headed over to the guild, all I could see were people either sitting or

lying down on the side of the streets.

The guild itself was almost empty; the only people present were the guild staff, with nary a hint of any of the adventurers who were usually present.

As for the guild staff themselves, they were simply lazing around with their upper bodies draped over the counter.

And amongst them, with her check pressed against the top of the counter as she rested, was Luna.

None of the others looked like they would even acknowledge us, so my group and I walked over to her.

"Hey, what's going on? Is the entire town like this?"

"Ah, is that Dust-san? Well, I wonder..."

Luna's eyes were half closed as she lazily responded.

It's almost hard to believe that she's the same Luna who busted her ass off working for the adventurer's guild every day.

"Hey, really, what happened to you?"

Lynn grabbed Luna's shoulders and shook her, and Luna didn't seem to put up any resistance at all.

"Hold on a second, Lynn, wouldn't it be fine for me to fondle her breasts now?"

"Of course not! Why is everyone so drained!? It's almost like... Hmm? Hey, Dust, doesn't this feel like what happened to Keith and Taylor?"

"Now that you mention it, it does seem like how you two were acting after returning from that dungeon."

They had the exact same symptoms that Keith and Taylor had after we found the porn books at that dungeon.

Though, from the confused look on their faces, it seems like they had very few memories from that time.

"That means it might be related to that dungeon somehow. Do you guys remember anything?"

"Well, the moment I stepped into that room, it felt like a massive wave of fatigue crashed over me, to the point where it was too bothersome to even think."

"Yeah, yeah, everything was so tiresome. I wanted to do nothing more than sleep and eat all day."

If it's the same as them, there's a decent chance that everyone in town will go back to normal after a couple of days.

That means there's no need to panic.

"Hmm... Is it really the same as what happened to Taylor and Keith? Say, Luna-san, when did this start happening?"

"Weeell... People started skipping work starting three days ago, perhaps... my body feels much heavier today than the day before... the doctors say it isn't an illness, but... Ah, I want to become a housewife and get pampered by an amazing husband..."

She started talking about something else halfway through.

Still, if you think about it, isn't what she just said really bad?

"That means that the symptoms steadily get worse. It happened almost instantly with Taylor and Keith."

"Isn't this really bad? If everyone gradually became this way, isn't there a chance that we'll end up the same way too?"

I felt my blood rush as I looked around me.

Now isn't the time to be taking it easy.

"W-What should we do!? We didn't bring back some kind of weird disease from that dungeon, did we?"

"Well, it seems logical to think that, but the way the symptoms gradually set in is quite different from what happened to us, isn't it?"

"One more thing, if you guys really did catch some weird disease in the dungeon, then why weren't Lynn and I affected? Isn't it odd? We were the ones who spent the most time in contact with you."

I can't figure it out at all.

There's too little information. I need to investigate this situation more.

"Let's split up and gather information. We'll meet up here later."

Everyone nodded and ran in their separate directions.

When these sorts of troublesome things happen, chances are that Kazuma and co are at the center of it all.

With that in mind, I headed over in the direction of that mansion.

Part 2

He wasn't home.

Instead, I ran into the suspicious individual sneaking around outside of Kazuma's mansion – Yunyun.

"Come on, at least visit your friend's house properly."

"But-but, I didn't manage to get a souvenir for Megumin even after boasting so much about my hot springs trip, so she would probably be angry..."

"Now's not the time for those kinds of considerations. Anyway, it doesn't seem like anyone's home. Do you know of anyone else we could rely upon?"

I checked up on the familiar general store on the way, but it wasn't open.

I also briefly checked in on the police station, and all of the police officers were lazing around like the rest of the townsfolk.

The thought that I could commit all the crimes I wanted right now briefly crossed my mind. Well, I won't do that though... No, really, I won't do that.

"Oh, I know, how about we pay a visit to the Magic Item shop? Vanir-san might know more about this phenomenon."

Yunyun slammed a fist into her palm, her eyes sparkling.

Well, it wouldn't be unusual if Sir does know the reason for this. With those all-seeing eyes of his, he might be able to come up with a good plan to resolve this too.

"Still, all Sir does recently is get us involved with his evil machinations. He might offer us a solution, but it's also likely that he might trick us again."

"But that only happened because you tried to get involved in his business. It's something you brought upon yourself, right?"

"Right, let's go consult with Sir. Come on, what are you spacing out for? Let's go."

"Seriously, that personality of yours..."

Despite her complains, Yunyun still ended up following me.

After entering the magic store, I spotted the ashen form of the shopkeeper sprawled in the corner.

And off by the shelves was Sir Vanir, paying no heed to the storekeeper as he organized the items.

“What happened this time, Sir?”

“Listen and be amazed. She fell for a scam while I was out. Someone claimed that moi caused some sort of incident while moi was on a trip and delivered a request for reparations, and she actually believed it and happily handed over the money.”

“Ah, that’s a pretty typical scam.”

It’s a trick that’s gotten really popular recently. Your friend or acquaintance caused a lot of damage while out on a trip, so compensate us for the damages.

It’s simple, but effective. The police have even issued warnings to be on guard for these types of claims.

“It absolutely is. If moi was in that situation, moi would be absolutely thankful for a way to legitimately dispose of the shopkeeper. ‘Just do whatever you wish with her, moi cares not.’ and that’d be the end of it. Why in the world would she pay up? Truly, this baffles me.”

“T-That’s because Vanir-san is important to her. She blindly believed the other party’s words because of her concern...”

“Moi has not fallen so far that moi’d require this incompetent shopkeeper to be concerned about me. Were it not for the money made through the photobook sales, we’d now be living a pauper’s lifestyle!”

Sir seemed a little happy when he said that, but that’s probably my imagination.

Sir is very particular when it comes to money, after all.

“Now then, what business does the possible homosexual and the master of loneliness have with me?”

“Please don’t call me that!”

“Master of Loneliness... that kind of sounds cool...”

Leaving the strangely happy Yunyun aside...

“Sir, I’m sure you’ve noticed that the town is in an extremely unusual situation. I thought you might know of a way to fix this or at least the cause of this situation.”

“Hmph, it seems like their vitality... no, it’s more accurate to say their motivation has been lost. After losing their energy, they’ll grow lazy and lethargic and end up just like this.”

“Just like I suspected. Say, a couple of my companions ended up in the same state some time ago. I was wondering if there’s a relation between that and what’s happening now.”

“That’s an interesting story. Do share more details.”

After relaying what happened in that dungeon to Sir, he placed his hand on his chin and fell deep into thought.

“There must be something in that room. Moi can’t say if it’s a pathogen or a magic item, or something else altogether, but that is undoubtedly the cause of this situation.”

“I-I think so too.”

“Yeah, of course. That means there’s no choice but to investigate that dungeon once more.”

“You should make haste if you are to do that. The Devil that sees through all so declares, if things remain as they are, the citizens of this town will eventually lose the will to eat and wither away.”

At those words, Yunyun and I exchanged glances.

“I-Isn’t that a huge problem!?”

“If it ever gets out that we were the cause of that, we’d never be able to clear our names! Let’s hurry up and gather anyone who seems like they’d still be of use and head over!”

Now that I've got the relevant information, I need to make haste back to the guild to meet up with the others and get ready for the trip.

I don't know how many people are left that'd be able to aid us in this task. In the worst case scenario, we might have to manage it with just us five.

"Ah, why don't you lend us a hand, Sir!?"

"Moi refuses. Moi needs to track down the con man who swindled the money and approach him under the guise of this incompetent shopkeeper. Moi shall tell him that he can do whatever he wants if he returns the money, and once he accepts, moi shall reveal my disguise and bask in his dark emotions."

"... My condolences for that con man. Still, thanks for the info."

Seems like it's impossible to expect any more aid from Sir Vanir.

Right, now to meet up with my companions!

Part 3

“So that was the cause after all. In that case, it’s only proper for us to do something about it.”

“Yeah, you’ve got to clean up after yourself.”

“It’s troublesome, but we need to do this.”

All my companions agree on going back to that dungeon.

“I-I don’t know how much help I’ll be, but I’ll go with you.”

It’s a great help that Yunyun’s willing to help us. She has the highest combat ability out of all of us, after all.

“If Yunyun-san isn’t of much help, I don’t know how useful I’ll be, but...”

Loli Succubus will be participating too.

It seems like the succubus shop was in a similar state, though in their case, losing both their motivation and the vitality from adventurers is pretty tough on the succubi.

I could really indulge myself if I went to the succubus store right now... It’s a real pity that we don’t have the time to spare.

Despite our best efforts at finding people for this mission, the final tally only came up to the six of us.

I ran around town searching for companions, but there wasn’t a single person who could move normally amongst the people I’m acquainted with.

The only people who weren’t in a lethargic state were people who recently moved into town, and it seems like you’ll end up in that state after spending just a day here.

“If only Kazuma and his party were around, but oh well. We’ll just have to manage.”

“This entire situation was caused by us, after all. Let’s set off quickly!”

After gathering the minimum necessities required for the journey, we soon

left the town of Axel.

Since speed is of the essence, we explained the situation to the carriage driver that we just used, after which he gladly offered us the use of his carriage.

At this rate, we'll arrive at the dungeon in less than half a day.

"Can you guys really not recall anything about what happened in that room?"

There's no way to think up any detailed plans without knowing what we're dealing with, so I tried to pump Keith and Taylor for more information, but...

"Well, see, now that I think back to it, there didn't seem to be anything special in that room. I just suddenly felt really lethargic upon entering it. There didn't seem to be any reason for that."

"I just... Didn't care about anything after entering that room, so I don't really recall much about it."

"Please, it'd be a big problem if we don't know anything about that part. We have no idea what's waiting for us."

"Well, it's something that drains energy from humans, so it could be the work of a devil."

"It could be the work of a magic item too. There was someone back at the Crimson Demon village who was researching if creating such an item was possible."

The ideas that Loli Succubus and Yunyun raised are distinct possibilities.

There are devils like Sir Vanir who feed off the dark emotions of people, and there are also ones like the succubi who feed off vitality, so it wouldn't be strange if there existed a similar devil that feeds off motivation.

As for magic items, I fully experienced how dreadful they could be from that magic bead incident. It wouldn't be strange at all for there to be one or two magic items that could drain a person's motivation.

"Both of them are possible. It's best to be on guard for both possibilities."

We saw quite a few monsters along the road, but they simply laid around in the sun.

Thanks to that, we arrived at the entrance of the dungeon without fighting a single battle.

"Alright guys, you've had time to prepare yourselves. Let's get in there!"

"...Yeah..."

And all the replies I got were listless.

Taken aback by the almost 180 degree reversal from just moments earlier, I turned around to see my companions sighing with drooped shoulders and downtrodden faces.

"H-Hey, don't tell me you guys..."

"Say, is there really a need to go into the dungeon? It'd probably be fine if we just let it run its course."

"Yeah, I'd rather take a nice long afternoon nap. There looks like a good spot."

Keith and Taylor put down their weapons and sat down on the ground, and started lazily eating their travel rations that they retrieved from their bags.

"Hey, what are you guys doing!? We were just about to delve into a dungeon!"

"Eh, who cares about that. Why don't we trade some dirty jokes instead?"

"It's fine, we can do that after a little nap."

Keith is just a little lazier than he usually is, but it's definitely weird for Taylor to act this much like a spoilt child.

There's no way a stiff and inflexible fool like him would say such words.

"Lynn, say something too!"

"Do we really have to do this? It's so much trouble... I would rather not if we don't have to..."

Lynn's reply caught me totally off guard.

I turned around to look at her, and it seemed like she was just barely standing as she tried her hardest to stifle a yawn.

"Dust-san, my body feels really lethargic. Something is really off..."

Yunyun roughly shook her head to keep her eyes from closing. It seemed like she was really struggling to keep awake.

"I can feel their vitality being drained away. Keith and Taylor went through similar experiences before, so it could be that they are more susceptible to it... *yawn...*"

So that's why they seemed worse off than everyone else.

Though, from the looks of it, it's only a matter of time. It won't be long before everyone else ends up lazing around too.

Looks like we just have to give up on Keith and Taylor.

"Right, let's charge right in! Don't think of anything unnecessary, just focus on advancing!"

"...Yeah..."

And cut it out with those lethargic responses.

Part 4

“Dust, leave me. I’ll just slow you down.”

“There’s no way I can just abandon you!”

Ignoring Lynn who said such noble-sounding words with a smile, I offered her my right shoulder as I continued trudging onwards.

“You don’t have to worry about me... I’ll read a book here and wait.”

“There’s no need to force yourself, Dust-san, just leave me here and go on ahead...”

Yunyun was attached to my back with a short length of rope, and I tightly held onto Loli Succubus with my left arm.

Despite the feeble words that the three of them offered, I continued trudging on. There’s no way I’d abandon them here.

“You guys just want to slack off, don’t you!? Why do I have to work this hard for you!?”

That room was just a short distance away, but as we started getting close, these guys started refusing to walk and clamouring for a break or some such, so I had no choice but to forcibly drag them along like this.

“Why don’t we all take a nap together? I might even let you join if you agree right now.”

“I-It’s a little embarrassing, but I’ll bear with it.”

“I’ll give you an amazing dream free of charge~”

“Shut up! Stop tempting me with such amazing offers! You’re making me want to dive right in!”

I really want to drop everything and take a nap with them, but in this situation, it’s possible that it’d be the last thing I ever do.

“Why are you the only one who’s energetic...”

“Yeah, usually, Dust-san would be the first to talk about skipping work.”

"Don't tell me it's because you already lack motivation, so getting a bit of your motivation sucked out wouldn't make a huge difference?"

Dammit, these girls sure like to shoot their mouths off.

Still, now that they mention it, why am I the only one unaffected?

Sure, I do think that delving into this dungeon is a chore. I really want to go back to Axel and kick back with a glass of sake.

That's what I genuinely think, but it's just the same as what I usually think, so it's not like anything's changed.

"Seriously, it's only just a short while ahead, so please hang in there. What will I do if it's something I can't handle by myself?"

They didn't even bother to respond.

This isn't working. Would it really be best to leave them here and head on ahead by myself?

The monsters we encountered in this dungeon were all laying around in a stupor, so they shouldn't be in any danger...

"But there's still a chance... Ahh, how troublesome."

Despite all three of them pulling on me, I eventually arrived in front of that room.

"Pant pant D-Damn, I'm tired. Hey, we're here."

"Five more years-" x3

"Stop fooling around and wake up already!"

I dropped everyone who was taking a nap while clinging onto me on the floor, but none of them showed any signs of waking up.

I opened the door and started dragging the three of them in.

Despite that, there was still no response..

"Dammit, guess I really need to leave them here."

I left them in the room that appeared to be the residence of the owner of this dungeon.

I can't really investigate with them in that state.

"Every single one of them has such happy faces..."

I wanted to voice my complaints at them, but those words died on my lips when I looked at the carefree faces of the three of them as they slept.

After a brief search, I pressed the switch that opens the hidden door, and warily proceeded into the area beyond.

The two doors greeted me on my entrance. Last time, I investigated the left door and ended up getting the treasure. Keith and Taylor took the right door, right?

I pressed my ears against the right door, but couldn't hear anything.

I twisted the doorknob and slowly opened the door. It's fairly dark inside, but not to the point that I couldn't make out my surroundings. There's a faint light coming from the ceiling, bright enough for me to make out that this room feels very lived in.

"It's just like the other room. Chair, table, bed. There's trash strewn around here, so perhaps it's someone's residence?"

I cautiously stepped foot into the room. There doesn't seem to be any place in here large enough to hide a person, but it's best to be careful.

There are a lot of unknown items strewn around the area.

There is a small flat plate with glass stuck to one side. There's a palm-sized cross attached to a thick black cord, and also round items with a small protrusion on them. I have no idea what those things are.

"The hell is this?"

Looking through the piles of garbage, I noticed one thing.

There are a lot of food containers amongst them.

There are empty preserved food wrappers and also bags from the recently popular bakery in town. That means that this place was in use until fairly recently. Plus, with the amount of garbage here, there's a chance that there's more than one person involved.

Moving onto the desk, I discovered a diary hidden in one of the drawers. Hoping for there to be some clue hidden within, I started reading it.

"- X day Y month, my secret hideout is finally done. I'm sick of telling them that it's impossible over and over. This will be my sanctuary. I've even managed to recreate manga from Japan, so I'll slack off here to my heart's content."

It seems to be the diary of the guy who made this dungeon and those erotic books.

There might be something in it regarding what is happening in Axel right now. I continued flipping the pages.

"- X day Y month, I managed to divert funds to work on this project, but the scale model is starting to take shape. I think I'll be able to fool them with that. The problem is the core. I need to keep them from realizing that this is the primary purpose. Sucking motivation out of people and turning it into energy seems like ridiculous garbage at first glance, but it seems surprisingly doable. It's worth looking into."

Yeah, this guy is definitely behind what's happening in Axel right now.

Are there any pages that go into more detail?

"- X day Y month. Dammit, I can't slack off at all! The number of times I've managed to visit this hideout has been greatly reduced too! But I won't give up. It's only a short while till that project is complete. I funded it with the money I diverted from the mobile weapon program. I haven't tried activating it yet, but it's almost done. Once it's activated, it should suck out the motivation from anyone nearby and turn them lethargic. Then I won't need to work on that stupid project any longer. I'll make it a palm-sized sphere so it can be easily hidden. Ah, I can't wait for it to be completed."

I think I can see where this is going.

I'm a little concerned as to what happens next, so let's keep reading.

"- X day Y month. I've found a fatal flaw during the startup experiment. Once activated, it will suck my motivation away as well, so I won't be able to enjoy games or manga afterwards. I'll have to set it up such that the activator and those close to him won't be affected. For the sake of safety, I'll set it up such

that it will automatically cease operation when the activator moves a certain distance away. I'll make it such that the person who first activates it won't be affected even if another person uses it. Then, the first time it's activated, its effects should be weak, and its effects and range will steadily increase the second time it's activated... The mobile weapon project is almost complete. I'm never working again when it's done! I'll activate this and take a long term vacation!"

"So it really was the writer of this diary who's behind this..."

The pages after this entry were blank.

Now that I look closely, there are traces of pages getting ripped out, and the remaining piece had the words "Instructions manual" written on it.

Did this man meet his end without activating that magic item? The words mobile weapon piqued my interest, but right now I need to do something about this situation.

From what the diary says, this situation is the result of that magic item getting activated.

A spherical magic item, huh?

"Sphere... Hmm? It sounds familiar..."

It feels like I'm forgetting something, but I can't quite place my finger on it, so let's leave it aside for now.

There wasn't anything else interesting in the room, so I took the diary with me and left.

There's a high chance that something is currently making its residence here and is just out for the moment. Alternatively there could be another hidden room in here.

I placed my ear against the other door, and this time I heard a voice.

"No... great... can't get enough... so hot...."

The voice is muffled through the door, but it sounds like there's multiple people in there.

What are they doing in there? That room is... Don't tell me...

Slowly opening the door to minimise the amount of noise created, I saw three men, their backs turned to me, in the room. They were way too engrossed in reading their books to notice my entrance.

"I just wanted to lay low until the heat died off, but we've really stumbled on the jackpot this time!"

"Yeah, boss. There's a whole ton of the kinds of treasures that we are looking for out here. The eyes on these pictures are a little bigger than I'd like, but that's but a small matter."

"Our luck has really been on the downturn ever since we got beaten up by that delinquent adventurer, but to think that we'd make such a fortunate discovery! It's probably due to this charm, isn't it?"

One of the three took out something from within his cloak, but I couldn't see it from this angle.

I think I've heard their voices somewhere before...

"Ever since we got our hands on that, the monsters don't bother us, and they weren't suspicious of me at all when I went out to procure food from Axel."

"Even though we made an enemy of the Adventurer's guild, they didn't react to us at all when we got near. Maybe it really is thanks to this ball. I should rub it for good luck."

The man the other one called boss, and also the one with the best physique amongst them, took a ball into his palm and started playing around with it.

...Isn't that the spherical object I found when I first entered this room?

That's the item I threw away after pressing the button on the top, right?

That means that Taylor and Keith ended up lethargic because I activated it the first time, and Lynn was unaffected because she was next to me.

Then these guys activated it, but it didn't affect me because I activated it once before. It all makes sense now.

"Wait, if the diary is to be trusted, isn't this really bad?"

If the strength and area of effect of the item is increased when it's activated for the second time, doesn't that mean that this is also partially my fault?

... I'll dispose of that diary later.

After passing that ball amongst themselves, the men went back to reading their books.

Judging from what I've heard, these guys are criminals, so there's no problems if I launch a surprise attack them and take them out.

Standing on tiptoes, I snuck into the room.

All three of them seem to be mumbling amongst themselves.

As I drew closer, I could clearly make out what they were saying.

"These pictures are really cute. Their eyes and mouths are a little too big, but I really like how young they look."

"It's nice, isn't it? I can't read the words, but I can get the general idea. This one looks to be a housewife, but no matter how I look at it, she can't be beyond her teens. This is the best!"

"But erotic stuff is a no go. Lolis should be admired from afar but not touched, don't you remember that?"

"Y-Yeah, only the very lowest of scum would lay a hand on a young girl."

"O-Of course..."

These guys seems to just be reading books without erotic content, but I think they are hiding erotic books behind their backs.

And, I know I've heard those painful words somewhere before.

These guys are that lolicon group who tried to kidnap Lynn some time ago and got beaten up by me!

"That expression where they look up towards you with tearful eyes are the best!"

"No no, it's obviously best when they are smiling! The smile of a girl is worth far more than any amount of gold or gemstones!"

"That's why you're both still amateurs! Girls are cute no matter what they are doing!"

"Boss! We'll follow you to the ends of the earth!" x2

"Stop being so mushy!"

Seeing three grown men hug each other in a sordid display of emotion, I couldn't help but voice my thoughts.

The three of them turned towards me.

Yep, that's definitely those guys from that lolicon group.

"Yo, so you guys were here too, huh?"

"You're that Loli kidnapper!"

All three of them pointed at me and yelled.

"I'm not! Don't make it sound that bad!"

Seems like they remember my face too. In particular, their boss seems to have a very strong impression of me. He seems much more excited than the others.

"I won't forget your evil deeds! Even if you ended up awakening something in me, I won't forgive you!"

"B-Boss..."

The man who started blushing and averted his gaze from the boss is the one I caught, right?

Come to think of it, I seem to recall stripping him naked and tying him together with the boss back then.

The boss seems livid, but the bashful expression that the minion had towards the boss seems quite similar to the ones Keith and Taylor showed to me a couple of days ago... No, it's best not to dwell on that.

"What are you doing here!? You're not planning on capturing us and turning us over to the cops, are you!? We haven't done anything criminal since then!"

"Yeah, yeah!" x2

"I don't really care about you guys, but could you guys hand that ball over to me? I'll let you guys go if you do."

Right now, turning the residents of Axel back to normal takes precedence.

There's probably something written in the diary about how to stop it, but it should stop working if I smash it.

"Are you referring to the good luck charm? So it really is something valuable after all. Like hell I'm handing them over to you! You seem like you're alone... Now's a good chance. You two, beat him black and blue for the sake of our companions and my revenge!"

"Yes boss!" x2

They readied their weapons and started closing the distance between us.

It's not the best course of action to take them head on when they outnumber me like this.

... I thought of a great idea.

I dashed back through the door and past the secret door, back to the weathered room.

"Hey, don't you dare run away! I still haven't forgotten that sensation and humiliation you put me through! I don't swing that way!"

"I didn't exactly enjoy it either..."

Let's just ignore the underling's words.

The boss is using a spear just like before. The underlings are armed with short swords.

And my defence against them would be... the sleeping Loli Succubus. I grabbed her from behind and swung my sword in their general direction.

"Touching is... Forbidden..."

Stop talking in your sleep!

"Don't you dare move!"

"Y-You coward! Isn't she your friend!?"

“What kind of bastard are you!? Lolis are the treasure of humanity!”

“T-This guy is a devil...”

They backed away in the face of my threat.

Seems like it's super effective.

“Drop your weapons if you want to see her unharmed!”

“D-Don’t get hasty! Don’t you dare lay a finger on that angelic skin!”

In the face of my threats, they immediately threw down their weapons and raised their hands above their heads.

“Scum...”

“The lowest...”

“Those guys seem more gentlemanly...”

The three sleeping beauties seemed to be saying something, but I ignored it. Come on, just quietly sleep.

I only had to do this because you guys ended up being useless.

I kicked the weapons that they dropped to the edge of the room.

Afterwards, I retrieved some rope from my bag and bound all three of them together.

“At least tie me together with that loli! It’d be a reward for me!”

“No fair, boss! I want that too! It’d be better if it was a little tight!”

“I’d prefer the ponytail girl myself. If possible, in a position where she’s looking down at me!”

“Shut up! Just sit down there and let me finish this!”

After shutting the three of them up, I finished my task.

It felt like a job well done, but I still haven’t destroyed the ball that was the cause of this entire situation.

“Hey, hand over that ball.”

“Heh, too bad! I hid that ball away!”

The boss let out a smile of triumph as he said that.

Seems like he doesn't fully understand what kind of situation he's in.

"I'm impressed that you could say that as you are right now. Seems like you don't quite understand your position."

"I won't crack no matter what you do! You can't do what you did back then in this situation, can you!?"

Last time, I extracted information from him by pushing his face into the naked crotch of his underling, and he seems to be under the mistaken impression that I won't be able to do anything to him now that they are all bound together.

It's true that I can't use the exact same method as before, but there are plenty of ways to extract information from people, especially against this bunch.

Plus, even if he remains silent, there's not that many hiding places that he could've used on such short notice.

After tying the three of them to a pillar, I once again entered the room and started searching the bookcases, but turned up empty,

"That's odd. There's only books and bookshelves in this room. Perhaps it's in the other room?"

I carefully searched the room that I found the diary in, but once again turned up empty. I emptied the rubbish bin and searched under the bed, but still found nothing.

Seems like asking them would be faster than searching for it. That leaves me but one option.

I returned to the room where the three securely bound men were still there, staring at the sleeping forms of Lynn and the others.

"You sure hid it pretty well in such a short time. After becoming the boss, I'm sure threatening you won't make you open your mouth anytime soon. Say, is it just me, or does it feel cold in this room?"

"Where did that come from? It doesn't really feel cold or anything."

"Oh, is that so? But I do feel a little chilly. I wonder if there's something I can burn to keep warm here... Ah, what do you know, there's some perfectly burnable books lying around."

Saying that, I retrieved the books that they were reading and the ones they had hidden on them.

"W-W-Wait a minute... what do you plan on doing?"

"It's cold, so I'm going to start a fire using these to keep warm. You guys can just watch from there while I warm myself up."

"Wait wait wait, no, hold on! Don't do anything rash!"

As I brought the flame of the lantern closer to the pile of books, the three of them started to get agitated.

I didn't have any intention of burning such treasures either, but watching their reactions amused me.

After a few more close calls, the boss finally crumbled.

"Okay, okay, fine, I'll tell you! So stop! There's a sliding bookcase in the right corner of that room! I placed the ball on the pedestal like thing in the room behind that!"

"I didn't know there was a room like that-"

"Eeh!? Boss, you left it there?"

One of the underling's eyes widened with shock.

Why is he so surprised?

"Boss, didn't you read the warning pasted in front of that room? It warns you not to place the ball on that pedestal! Something about the scale model will start moving or something!"

"Oh."

The Boss met his underlings's gaze with a slowly dawning look of realization.

It doesn't seem to be a joke or ruse of some sort.

"Hey, tell me what's written on the notice. It's just going to bother... me!?"

With a large grating noise, the ground started shaking..

It was only a small rumble at first, but it quickly became violent enough that I had trouble keeping my footing.

“W-W-What the hell is going on!?”

“I knew that you shouldn’t place it there! It was written in large red letters and everything!”

“Even if you tell me that now...!”

Even though the shaking was violent enough that cracks started forming in the walls and bits of earth started falling from the ceiling, Lynn and the others simply looked over to me blankly and made no movements to escape.

“Hey, we’re running! Hurry up and stand up!”

“Ehh-? That sounds like a chore-”

“Idiot, you’ll really die like this! Ah, dammit!”

Judging from how fast the dungeon is collapsing, there’s no way I’ll make it out in time if I had to drag the three of them along as well.

That means...

“Hey, I’ll cut your ropes, so help me carry these three out! We’ll be buried alive at this rate!”

“Gladly!” x3

Hearing such enthusiastic replies from them made me uneasy in a different sense, but I can trust these guys to protect them with their lives.

“I’ll take care of the pink haired loli!”

“Hey, no fair, boss! I wanted to take care of her too!”

“Then I’ll take care of the one with the ponytail.”

They started arguing amongst themselves, but no one seemed to choose Yunyun.

Hey, come on, she looks like she’s about to cry! Stop discriminating based off appearances!

In the end, the boss ended up carrying Loli succubus, and the other two worked on carrying Lynn together.

And naturally, the odd one out, Yunyun, was left to me.

“Sob, I’m unwanted...”

I think I heard a sobbing voice coming from my back, but I ignored it as I ran out towards the entrance at full speed.

I’m a little concerned for the others, but they ran ahead of me with surprising speed. Did the sense of duty that comes with carrying Loli Succubus and Lynn raise their speed?

Mere seconds after I made it out of the dungeon, the entrance collapsed into a heap of rubble.

I, along with the three others, collapsed onto the ground, panting heavily after that exertion.

Though, those guys managed to gently lay Lynn and Lolis Succubus down despite their condition.

“Sob, sob, I’m the only one being treated horribly...”

On the other hand, I tossed Yunyun to the side the instant we were out of danger.

“*Pant... Pant...* Just be thankful... that you’re alive...”

I weakly answered while trying to catch my breath.

Having exhausted all their strength, the three former criminals could only gaze up at the sky with a dazed expression on their faces.

Part 5

When the rumbling subsided, the girls started sitting up and looking over to us.

“Mmm~... Eh, why am I back outside?”

“Yawn~ Good morning...”

“It feels like all that fatigue has gone away... It might have been because I got flung to the ground...”

They seem a fair bit more energetic than before, as they started stretching like they've just woken up from a long nap.

They must have gotten their energy back after that orb was destroyed.

“What was that tremor just now?”

“Hey Dust. Who're those guys?”

Keith and Taylor leisurely strolled over.

So these guys are back to normal too. Yeah, that ball has got to have been destroyed in the collapse of the dungeon.

“You two sure are carefree, aren't you? You better be real grateful to me after all the effort I went through to get you guys back to normal.”

If my companions are acting this way, then it's only a matter of time before everyone in Axel returned back to normal.

That's the end of this incident, then. Not being able to retrieve the other books left in that room hurts a little, but...

“Well, you must have done something to resolve this while we're out. Let's go back, then.”

Just as everyone started making preparations for the journey back, the ground started shaking again.

I had a really bad feeling; no, actually, I'm certain something bad is happening. I turned back towards the dungeon just in time to see the rocks

collapsed in front of the entrance go flying.

“Kyaaa!”

“Protect the girls! Graah!”

The three of them barely managed to block a large piece of the rubble that came flying our way before hitting the ground.

“Oh, wow, I really didn’t expect you guys to go that far. That’s really deserving of-No, wait, that’s for later! Something’s coming!”

When the dust cleared, a giant, eight legged, spider-like thing could be seen standing at the entrance.

It’s almost twice as big as I am, but this looks just like-

“It looks like a giant spider. Just what is this thing?”

“What is that!? Hmm? Wait, I kind of feel like I’ve seen this thing on the request board before...”

Loli Succubus and Yunyun seems to be a little confused, but the rest of us knew what it was the moment we laid eyes on it.

And, knowing exactly what it is, we broke out in cold sweat.

“I think I’ve seen this thing before. It’s quite a bit smaller, but...”

“What a coincidence, I think so too...”

“Nah, it’s probably just my imagination...”

“This looks just like the Destroyer that we took on together with Kazuma, but...”

In response to our murmurs, my companions and I gulped.

Seeing that, the blood drained from Yunyun and Loli Succubus’s faces too.

The destructive power of the Destroyer is well known, after all.

“Y-Y-You’re not talking about that Destroyer, right? The one that stomps about and destroys towns and villages!? That high bounty target that Megumin couldn’t stop bragging about after she took it out!?”

Yunyun latched onto my chest and started tearfully shaking me, but I

remained rooted to the spot.

Just as she said, it's a splitting image of that giant golem, the mobile fortress Destroyer. It's quite a bit smaller than the actual article, but it still looks like it has more than enough power to crush us into dirt.

"W-W-Why is there a small Destroyer here!? Is it its child!?"

"Calm down, Lynn! Golems can't have children!"

While we were distracted, the mini-Destroyer cleared away the remaining rubble blocking the entrance and revealed its full form to us.

The face of the destroyer is filled with a multitude of glowing eyes, though, now that I look at it, one of the eyes isn't glowing, and bears a very close resemblance to the ball that those three former criminals had on them.

Could it be that it stopped draining motivation after activating the Destroyer?

"It'd be a really big problem if we let this thing escape and head towards Axel! It'd be great if they recovered their motivation just like you guys, but if they're still stuck in a stupor, this thing will walk all over them! We need to trash it here!"

If they found out that I was the cause of all this, they won't possibly let me off lightly.

Let's completely remove all of the evidence here!

"Yeah. I don't really get what's going on, but we were the ones in charge of investigating this place, so we bear some responsibility for this."

"Leave the defence to me."

"Oh fine! Let's do this like the time we fought the hydra! I'll use rope to seal its movements!"

Seems like my companions agree with me.

They are putting on a brave front, but their expressions are stiff. Well, not that I'm in much of a position to judge.

"I-I'll help too! If I defeat it here, I'll be able to brag about it to Megumin!"

Yunyun seems willing to lend us a hand too.

I'm expecting some amazing things from you, miss number one mage of the Crimson Demons.

Lastly, Loli Succubus approached the three who were collapsed on the ground and did something to them.

Shortly afterwards, the three men shot up to their feet and saluted Loli Succubus.

"Your orders, please!"

"What did you do, Loli Succ... sa?"

"I showed them a small part of their ideal dream, and asked them to help me if they wanted to see the rest."

She stuck her tongue out, but rather than making her come off as cute, it made her seem more devilish than before.

This is the first time I've thought of her as a first rate Succubus.

"The weak point is that eye that isn't glowing. If you can smash that, it should stop moving. Right, let's do this!"

"Don't worry, leave it to me!"

Keith quickly notched a rope arrow and shot it at the massive golem.

The rope got entangled amongst several of its legs, and the three men immediately grabbed on and started pulling.

"Keep at it! The best performing one will get another girl in their dreams!"

"YEEEAH!" x3

You know, I think those three have the highest morale out of all of us.

One of the legs of the mini-destroyer swung in the direction of Lynn during its struggles.

"Not on my watch!"

Placing himself between Lynn and the leg, Taylor took the blow on his shield and managed to hold it off.

"I'll try and fend it off for as long as I can, but I don't think I can do this for

very long!"

"I can't fall behind! Light of Saber!"

The blade of light that emerged from Yunyun's hand severed two of the eight legs and sent them flying.

I picked up the spear that the boss has tossed aside and charged straight at the mini-destroyer.

It tried to intercept me with three of its remaining legs, but like hell I would be hit by any of them when it's entangled like this.

My body still remembers the stance and footwork needed to use a spear.

Dodging past the flailing legs, I charged straight up to it.

The ropes provided convenient handholds as I made my way on top of the mini-destroyer's body.

I let my guard down against the Hydra back then, but don't think that this will end up the same way!

After locating the solitary unglowing eye on its head, I jumped down at it.



“Eat this!”

The spear that had my entire weight behind it struck against the ball, cracking its exterior. Despite that, the mini-destroyer still continued struggling.

Clinging onto its head to avoid getting thrown off, I shouted towards Lynn.

“Cast a spell at this spear, hurry!”

“Roger, leave it to me! Lightning!”

I used the ropes to slide down to the ground, and not a moment too soon.

The flash of lightning that emerged from Lynn’s hand struck the spear head on, and an explosion followed shortly thereafter. The shockwave sent me rolling across the ground to upside down against a tree. Fortunately, apart from a few bruises, I was still mostly unharmed.

The same couldn’t be said of the mini-Destroyer. It let out one last shudder before collapsing to the ground. With its legs either strewn about or in a mangled heap, it’s obvious that this thing won’t be moving again anytime soon.

“At the end of the day, you still aren’t cool.”

“Yeah. He was kind of cool in a Crimson Demon sense for a while there, though...”

“Well, that’s Dust for you.”

Instead of getting concerned for me, the girls instead started shooting their mouths off.

I wanted to shoot back with a couple of quips myself, but then I noticed something vitally important.

“Nevermind that, come a little closer. Just three more steps would do.”

From this position, I’d be able to see under their skirts if they were to move just a little closer.

Lynn wears short pants, so I don’t really have any interest in seeing hers, but the other two should have some amazing sights indeed.

And the fast approaching sole of Lynn’s boots is their response.

Epilogue

Part 1

"We can't offer you too much because it's an informal quest, but please accept this for resolving this crisis. Thank you for your work."

Luna showed us a bright smile as she handed over a bag filled to the brim with gold coins.

Even though we didn't complete a quest nor was there any bounty on that target, the bag we received was quite weighty. They seemed to have decided upon this amount from the fragments of the diary that I failed to destroy and the remnants of the mini-destroyer.

With this much, there'd be more than enough money left over even after we split it up amongst us. I can pay off my debts and still have some money left.

"Seems like I missed something interesting while I was away."

"Ah, Kazuma. Well, I wouldn't say you missed it exactly, but, yeah, a lot happened."

We joined the table where Kazuma and his party were sitting at.

Seems like they just came back from their trip to the capital.

"Megumin, have you heard? I defeated a Destroyer too!"

"Hmph, what a pointless joke. Have you been alone for so long that you've stopped being able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality?"

"It wasn't a fantasy! I really did defeat one! That's not all, I even went on a date! Look! This stuffed frog is a present a guy gave to me! Isn't it amazing!? Hey, listen to me!"

The explosion girl and the loner were quarreling about something, but I ignored them.

I need to reserve Loli Succubus's portion of the prize money too. The other three already got a more than fair reward, so there's no need to split the money

with them.

The world of dreams is probably waiting for them tonight too.

"Hey, fill me in on what happened. You even got money out of it. So... It'll be your treat tonight, right?"

"Oh, isn't this a rare occasion. Will cats start flying tomorrow?"

"I'll be drinking my fill to make up for all the trouble you caused!"

"Yeah. It's a little cheap as repayment for all the sexual harassment, though."

Thanks to Kazuma's unnecessary words, I was suddenly the center of attention in the guild.

"H-Hey, who the hell even said that..."

My protests were drowned out by the clamour of the crowd, and fell upon deaf ears.

Kazuma's looking at me with a wide smile.

Well, he did treat me quite a few times, after all. Just this once...

"Give it up. I'll spot you for part of it, so cheer up."

"Yeah, it isn't bad to let loose like this every once in a while."

"Sake paid by someone else's dime tastes the best, but I guess I'll treat everyone this once."

Well, if Lynn and the others were to split the cost too, it wouldn't hurt my wallet that much.

Plus, these are the friends that I've been borrowing money from and doing stupid stuff with day in and day out, after all.

"Alright, fine! It's my treat for tonight! Everyone, drink to your heart's content!"

TLed by Cannongerbil, Edited by Ulti, Xenthur, @www.CGtranslations.me

Part 2

Even though night has fallen, the party was still in full swing.

Kazuma's priest has broken out her party tricks, to the rabid applause of everyone present.

Megumin and Yunyun were about to face off in a drinking contest before Darkness and Kazuma stopped them. You wouldn't know it from looking at him, but he's a surprising stickler for rules, that Kazuma.

I stepped outside to catch a breather from the hustle, but the noise from the guild could still be clearly heard coming from behind me.

The stars were shining brightly in the sky as I gazed upwards.

"The sky, huh..."

Even though it was night, a flying bird flits across my vision. It reminded me of the past for a brief moment.

"What are you so melancholic for? It doesn't suit you~"

An unsteady Lynn crashed against my shoulder.

Her breath stinks of alcohol, and when I turned around, her wide, carefree smile greeted me.

"You're in a good mood."

"Everyone made it back fine, so of course I'd be in a good mood."

"Is that so?"

"By the way~ I've been concerned about this for awhile now, but you're not hiding something from us, are you?"

A serious expression suddenly appeared on her face.

I was a little surprised by that question, but I should proceed calmly.

"What are you talking about? Don't tell me you're referring to the time I sold your underwear for money?"

"Right, sit down right here! I'm going to bury you six feet under!"

She started trying to chant her spells, but it seems like she's too drunk to pronounce the words properly.

As I moved to support the unsteadily swaying Lynn, she suddenly glared at me.

"It's not like you to brood on your own. We're your friends, so if you have anything on your mind, you should tell us about it."

Don't stare at me with such pure eyes. You'll make me want to spill some unnecessary stuff.

Averting my gaze, I looked towards the night sky once more.

It might be fine to tell her about it.

"The truth is..."

snore

I could hear her snoring.

Drool dripping from the edges of her mouth soaked into my shoulder.

"Wait, seriously? *Sigh*. Would someone really fall asleep at such a time?"

Bearing Lynn on my back, I headed back to the guild.

After all, you'd have a better chance of seeing a good dream being surrounded by that kind of rowdiness than laying down in a quiet place.

At least, that's what I think.





なんだかんだ根は
仲間思いのダストさんが
垣間見れたお話で
よかったです。
混浴はロマンですね…!

憂姫はぐれ



「あの愚か者にも脚光を!」第二巻、
発売おめでとうございます。
本編ではあまり触れてあげる事の
出来ないキャラ達の活躍が、
こちらでもっともっと見られる事を
期待しております!

暁なつめ

外伝2巻発売おめでとうございますー!
本編では見られないキャラの
あんなことやこんなことが
外伝で読めてホクホクしております。
ノ 今回の表紙のゆんゆんも
ご馳走様でした…!

三嶋くろね

I'm really glad we caught a glimpse of the Dust-san that thinks about his companions. The romance of the hot springs...!

Yuuki Hagure

Congratulations on the release of the second volume of “A time in the limelight for this fool too!” I’m really looking forward to seeing the characters who ended up on the wayside in the main series shine here!

Akatsuki Natsume

Congratulations on releasing two spinoff volumes! I’m beaming happily to see the characters who rarely appear in the main series get up to all kinds of hijinks in the spinoff. The Yunyun on the cover is amazing too...!

Mishima Kurone

Well, that's the end of the second Dust spinoff. Unfortunately, I was only able to get my hands on one of the short stories, which will be going up next week. If anyone knows of a way to get the other two short stories, please contact me via discord Furthermore, as you might have noticed, we still lack adequate artists to cover all the art stuff, so if you would like to help, my discord is always open.

As usual, I'll be taking a short break while I try to get the volume 14 translations up to snuff. Tentatively, I'll put 17th august for the release of the prologue, though I can't make any promises owing to the fact that I'm currently in the middle of translating it. Of course, I will be posting early copies up on my patreon, so it's always there if you must have volume 14 as soon as possible.

There will be a few miscellaneous short stories going up within the break, but assuming nothing goes wrong, I'll see you guys again on the 17th of August.

Till we meet again.